

Testimony before the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement  
On HB 6402 An Act Concerning Higher Education  
Submitted by Meghan Finley, PhD, Associate Professor of Sociology, Manchester Community College  
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My name is Dr. Meghan Finley, I am an associate professor of sociology at Manchester Community College. I urge you to pass HB 6402 with the substitute language provided in my written testimony.

The CSCU system office has asked, and continues to ask, for blind allocation of funds to grow the central office coupled with blind acceptance of consolidation as a solution to reducing system costs and putting “students first” while ignoring the proverbial elephant in the room: Enrollment. Increased enrollment will do far more to make the CSCU system self-sustaining than consolidation of services.

We have an enrollment problem at the CSCU system. The national and state birth rate is declining; Connecticut has seen a population decline over the past five years; and fewer students are enrolling in colleges amidst the many hardships created by COVID-19. The number of students in our system is shrinking and was shrinking prior to COVID-19<sup>1</sup>. Enrollment is critical to sustaining and growing the CSCU system. Where is the specific plan to increase enrollment? Who is the expert with a proven track record (be it in a community college system or a state university) of increasing enrollment and how are they addressing it? Where is the evidence that enrollment efforts, if any, are working? What is the plan for enrollment management during and after the transition to consolidation?

A decade or so ago, the CSCU system implemented, at great cost, the Transfer Articulation Program (TAP) to create a pathway for students to seamlessly transfer to a 4-year institution. TAP was designed to ensure that all credits would transfer from a CT state community college to a 4-year university (CSU). The BOR insisted that this would have a net positive effect on the student population (just as they now insist consolidation will) and would lead to increased enrollment. For almost a decade, hundreds of faculty members invested their time and energy to build TAP programs and taxpayers have funded numerous administrative positions to run TAP.

My non-teaching work currently has me co-writing a required report to our regional accreditor, NECHE<sup>2</sup> (New England Commission of Higher Education). I requested data including what percentage of credits transfer from community colleges to the CSUs and if TAP students graduate within two years and received no information. I have not seen this data as a Framework Implementation Review Committee (FIRC) representative that helped develop TAP pathways. I have not seen this data as the MCC Sociology contact for the TAP Sociology pathway.

I cannot answer, for NECHE, the most basic question—a question that EVERY student who might enroll in the community college system deserves to know and every taxpayer would likely demand to know: For TAP students who transfer to a CSU, will their credits transfer so they can graduate in two years? If TAP students are able to attend a community college for 2 years and transfer to a CSU with all their credits accepted (which was the goal of TAP) that should be shouted from the rooftops as a way to increase enrollment as a low-cost alternative to a 4-year education. NECHE will want to know this information. Students will want to know. The taxpayers should want to know. This is, as they say, low hanging fruit. Instead, the system office asks for more and more money to create a top-heavy bureaucracy that neither increases enrollment nor best serves the students of Connecticut.

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<sup>1</sup>[https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cha.asp#:~:text=Total%20undergraduate%20enrollment%20increase%20by%20students\)%20between%202010%20and%202018](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cha.asp#:~:text=Total%20undergraduate%20enrollment%20increase%20by%20students)%20between%202010%20and%202018)

<sup>2</sup>NECHE is the body that accredits regional colleges, including the CSCUs.