



State of Connecticut

The Connecticut General Assembly

The Planning Commission for Higher Education

LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING, ROOM 1800

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Judith K. Resnick, Chairperson

Meeting Minutes

March 11, 2014

3:30 p.m. Room 1E

The meeting was called to order at 3:40 p.m. by Judy Resnick.

The following commission members/designees/guests were present: E. Vagos Hadjimichael, David Walsh, Jason Jakubowski, Mary Lou Aleskie, Lois Schneider, Judith Resnick, Judith Goldfarb, Christopher Bruhl, Ted Yungclas, Lindy Lee Gold, Aynsley Diamond, Judith Greiman, Roberta Willis, Toni Boucher, Kerry Kelley.

Judy Resnick thanked the members for attending.

Members introduced themselves.

Roberta Willis welcomed everyone back.

Minutes from the last meeting were approved.

Judy Resnick turned the meeting over to Aims McGuinness, Senior Associate, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS.)

Aims McGuinness outlined the day's agenda and shared feedback from the regional forums that were held. Aims went on to state that the real intent of this planning effort is to have long-term goals, a long-term plan for Connecticut which covers the entire higher education system, public and private. It is a framework for the planning efforts for UCONN, the Connecticut State Colleges & Universities and the independent colleges and universities.

Vagos Hadjimichael brought up that he did not see anyone from the private institutions on the list of people interviewed and that we need to get them on board.

Aims McGuinness indicated that there has to be a much more deliberate strategy to deepen the engagement of more people in this effort.

Mary Lou Aleskie said that she is concerned that the diversity of our perspective maybe limited and that there is a huge non-profit sector and she is concerned when there are regional meetings with employers but we have, probably, the largest per-capita number of non-profits of any city in New Haven.

Aims McGuinness indicated that this is not the end and that the aim is to constantly build a larger circle. He continued that when the Commission gets back to the discussion of goals, one of the things about the goals is to keep thinking of them expressed in the way in which they will really gain the ownership of a broader group of people. He continued that when thinking of a strategic plan for higher education, most people think of a strategic plan for an institution. Our role is to connect higher education with the future economy and quality of life in Connecticut.

Judy Resnick shared that there is a list of the employers who attended the regional meetings that she will share with Commission Members at a later date.

Roberta Willis indicated that she liked the idea of the non-profits because they are employers as well as being part of the economy. She shared that there were hospitals in attendance at some regional meetings.

Aims McGuinness continued that one of the themes that he heard from the regional forums was “what makes Connecticut livable,” which relates to cost of living, availability of transportation, and quality of life related to the arts. Aims continued that feedback from employers is that we need to have people stay in Connecticut. He continued that higher ed has a major peripheral effect on that and the non-profits have exactly the same role.

Mary Lou Aleskie added that with regard to economic and community development we should remind ourselves that arts is a catalyst for place making is a part of DECD’s agenda, not to mention supporting the arts. We have to train people to run the efficiently and effectively.

Toni Boucher brought up that we have to worry about the demographics of the state. She continued that we’ve had a problem losing our young graduates who move to states that have job opportunities, and that we’ve seen a decrease in enrollment at our institutions of higher ed and that we need to differentiate if that is a national trend or if it is more severe in Connecticut.

Aims McGuinness said that we’ll come back to that issue in a few different ways. He continued it might be time to switch to the data to find out if there were points of the data that caused concern, and perhaps discuss the regional forum because the theme Toni Boucher mentioned came up. Aims said that if we really talk about the goals, there are probably only 2 or 3, one is to get a population of the state that is competitive across the range of post-secondary education, and the second one is how higher education contributes to the economy and quality of life that retains and can employ that population.

Aims McGuinness reviewed the summary of the data with the commission members.

Chris Bruhl said the bigger picture of the demographic picture of the state, and the disparity between the attainment levels in the current workforce and the demand level that we will need in the near future, and the inability to meet that need simply through traditionally aged students and the importance therefore of broadening our focus to include adults as the primary source which is indicated here ties in directly with both anecdotal and survey data that we have from our employers. He said that the net loss annually in

the 35 and younger group is not as significant as the under skilled worker who is with us and is not leaving, and will be with us though the rest of his/her career.

Aims McGuinness continued his review of the data.

Judy Resnick discussed the issue of the urban core population and how the businesses community understands that they need the bodies in terms of the numbers just to replace workers. The people are there, but they don't have the skills.

Aims McGuinness shared that it shows up more in the health sector with the difference between the people coming into the emergency rooms.

Judy Resnick brought up a comment made at one of the regional forums, that Fairfield County can't serve people of diverse backgrounds, if Fairfield County does not have people of diverse backgrounds.

Aims McGuinness underscored that people don't realize that we are talking about the population of Connecticut. He continued with the presentation.

Aynsley Diamond indicated that weather has been a huge implement to some important conversations to update the data. She continued that she hopes the commission is able to discuss the amazing progression that has happened at our community colleges.

Aims McGuinness responded that one of the things that we don't want to have happen here is people coming up and saying they are being ignored. He specified that the Board of Regents is not being put on the defensive, in fact most of the forum discussions were about all the good things the Board of Regents is doing. He emphasized that for this commission the real issue is making very clear to the public that we have a major problem that goes way beyond what the Board of Regents may be now working on.

Toni Boucher commented that the commission has to know what the issues are to make them better; otherwise you just become a politically correct body. She continued that the commission needs to find out where are weaknesses are, a way to fix them and improve.

Aims McGuinness went back to what the commission needs to do and stated that investments will need to be two to three times the amount that the recent initiatives are.

Judy Resnick added a reminder of the two goals; the first is to improve the overall educational attainment of Connecticut and that if we look at the data, the State of Connecticut is in trouble.

Roberta Willis commented that for her as a policy maker this is about where we are trying to go and what we should be investing in. She continued that looking at the data tells her we need to do more to arrive at the goal.

Aims McGuinness said that the good news is that the things that are on the table are well correlated with these kinds of goals. Aims continued with his presentation.

Judy Resnick commented on the regional forums, that with the exception of Stamford, it was difficult to get the participants off the theme of the inadequacies of the K-12 system. She continued that it was the first subject brought up in each session, and that forum participants do not trust what a diploma means, the academic and thinking skills are not there, neither are the employability skills. The lack of employability skills was not just for the 2 year, 4 year college graduate, or university level graduate.

Judy shared that there is a perception that the quality of professional or soft skills is gone. People don't know how to show up on time, or do to do with technology.

Roberta Willis brought up that the participants spoke very highly of vo-tech students who went on to college, indicating that those were the most desirable employees. They had the degree and the skills.

Judy Resnick continued that the skills came from work-based learning and internships. The value of work-based learning is invaluable for the student and the employer.

Judy Goldfarb asked if there was any data on people who have been involved with internships at the college level in Connecticut being hired by employers in Connecticut. She commented that students who intern during law school or graduate school, generally take a position where they have interned.

Aims McGuinness indicated that he does not have data that is Connecticut specific, but in general doctors work where they get their clinical experience. He continued to discuss feedback during the regional forums.

David Walsh commented that he taught internship programs for forty-four years. He shared that an internship was the best learning experience most students ever had because they had to learn how to dress, how to talk, how to act professionally, how to arrive at work on time, and to do whatever is asked of you. David share that with regard to the regional forum that he was surprised, he continued that CBIA did a study about five years ago polling employers in Connecticut regarding students graduating from UCONN and CSU being adequately trained to work. Both university systems were rated very highly. He continued that he wonders if the current complaints are conditioned by the fact that the public schools for a long time didn't produce people who were adequately trained.

Aims McGuinness shared that one of the things he thought was encouraging was that he couldn't think of almost any comment during the forums anyone said they were not satisfied with the graduates; in fact the reverse was the case. He continued that most examples were of the good relationships they had with community colleges, and that community colleges were considered to be part of the solution. Aims underscored Judy Resnick's comment that it was very hard to get participants at the forums off the K-12 issue.

Toni Boucher brought up that it is very important to learn what employers are saying about graduates. She shared that at one point major employers who hired high school graduates in Connecticut had to employ teachers to come in and teach basic math, writing and grammar so that they could become good employees. She stated that life skills, like showing up for work on time, knowing how to interact with colleagues at work, are very important. She continued that she receives feedback from her district regarding the different qualities of teacher candidates from the state universities vs. UCONN.

Aims McGuinness indicated that Toni Boucher's comments relate a bit to the discussion on ConnSCU. He continued that the commission will learn about the good things going on at ConnSCU later. He shared that the biggest gap in the USA is the preparation of existing teachers to implement the Common Core.

Judy Resnick commented that no one is pointing fingers at any college or university for not turning out a good product especially in the academic discipline. She continued that it's the other items such as employability skills, and it didn't matter what level they were at.

Vagos Hadjimichael shared that one common thread that he picked up on at two regional meetings was the K-12 and higher ed institutions were not engaged with the community and not producing the skills

the community needs. He also felt that UCONN received a great deal of negative comments that they isolated up in Storrs, not engaging with the community and they better do something about it.

Aims McGuinness shared that he recalled a more positive discussion about UCONN, particularly related to engineering.

Vagos Hadjimichael shared that his statements did not refer to community colleges.

David Walsh commented that UCONN's goal of recruiting high school graduates from outside the state will not do anything to help realize the plans we have, but that they may be counterproductive. He continued that neither CSU nor UCONN are engaged in the kinds of nuts and bolts of the economy that we are talking about.

Lindy Lee Gold commented that with regard to the private/public sector partnerships, mentorships, and engagements, in terms of the output from Southern, she doesn't think there was any negative statement except that their community engagement was lackluster. She continued that employers indicated that Yale had the least desirable skills. She specified that their engineers were useless for the functional things that were needed by local employers. She shared that it doesn't mean they are not rocket scientist, we just don't happen to have any rocket manufacturers.

Aims McGuinness confirmed that it's not just a need for engineers; it's for engineers who are a good match with the local economy.

Chris Bruhl suggested that it is wise for the Commission to not disproportionately concentrate on the quality of the graduate, since it is the quantity that we need to be concerned about. He continued that the more fundamental question is - are the institutions on higher ed in the state aware that there are people over the age of twenty-five who need to go to school as undergraduates. He continued that the answer is there are a couple, but the majority continue to describe the majority of the student population prospect population as non-traditional. He said that there have been very interesting conversations with employers and what is emerging is not so much skills, as a culture. We are a diverse society and individuals are entering into a uniform culture – the culture of work.

Aims McGuinness indicated that what we hope will come out of this meeting is a clear understanding of two major goals. One is that this state has a major challenge that it ought to gain consensus around, that 70%, which probably needs to be disaggregated to see if perhaps 40% with a Baccalaureate degree and about 30% with an associate's certificate. He continued that to reach those goals requires a narrowing of that subpopulation in question. The second relates to the connection of higher education and the future economy of the state and the region. We need a deep consensus of the challenge facing the state and the depth of the change that needs to take place. Aims continued his presentation.

Mary Lou Aleskie asked if we have the intuitional capacity to make the 70%.

Aims McGuinness replied that is the fundamental question that will be addressed at the next meeting.

Mary Lou Aleskie asked if we are focusing on an older workforce do we understand that the work life of that person is shorter than traditional students, and what does that do in terms of the turnover of the workforce. She asked if there is any analysis on this.

Vagos Hadjimichael asked Roberta Willis how much pull does the Planning Commission for Higher Education have with the legislature to get their plan through.

Roberta Willis replied that the legislature has already started to have that conversation. She continued that this commission is ongoing. She continued that with regard to the political will to make it happen, that's something being talked about now.

Aims McGuinness brought up that one of the things they found in other states is that if you really do a major effort to deepen the commitment of all the leaders, business and civic, of the state, that when issues are discussed before a legislative committee on specific matters you'll find legislators increasingly saying it's interesting, but how does it relate to these goals we've already agreed to.

Chris Bruhl suggested that if we try to do more business as usual, we will not arrive at our goal.

Aims McGuinness stressed that there is enough theme in the regional forum about how higher ed contributes to the quality of life in order to be able to retain and recruit people to Connecticut. He continued that companies were able to recruit engineers, but they didn't stay. Aims shared that he and Dennis Jones have been involved in Regional Stewardship, which are state policies that encourage institutions to be deeply engaged throughout their activities in the community. It involves service learning and internships, energy saving activities – anything that relates to sustainability and quality of life.

Ted Yungclas asked Aims if he could go a little deeper as to why professionals were not staying in certain areas. Why wouldn't engineers stay in certain areas?

Aims McGuinness shared that what was found was it relates to access to amenities, affordable housing, transportation, accessibility to the arts, access to technology, and the cost of living.

Chris Bruhl discussed new urban people and life style choice that is embedded in university life.

Aims McGuinness brought up that looking at Connecticut and the diverse economies in the different regions and view them as having higher ed institutions as the core of an intellectual and cultural climate which is linked to local economic development to make that a sustainable livable place for young people. A major goal is that somehow higher ed has to be connected to creating an economy that not only will train people but will attract and retain the kind of population that the state needs.

Kerry Kelley shared that a lot of these issues conform with the other strategic efforts going on.

Aims McGuinness indicated that the Governor's priorities match, the real issue tends to be scale.

Judy Resnick stated that we have to go into our next meeting to confirm that the two major themes Aims outlined today are really where we need to spend our time.

Aims McGuinness discussed that the next phase is, if those are the goals, what are the major policy barriers to get from here to there. He continued that in April they will have a plan of how to do that. The second one is how do we get a much deeper engagement with the business community and get them into the conversation. The agenda the commission is creating must have a longer term impact than session by session.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:23 p.m.