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COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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August 11, 2017

Mr. Mark E. Ojakian  
President  
Connecticut State System Office  
61 Woodland Street  
Hartford, CT 06105

Dear Mr. Ojakian:

I write to inform you that at its meeting on June 9, 2017, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the material submitted by the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities system (CSCU) regarding its plans to consolidate back-office services for all institutions under its purview and combine the twelve community colleges into a single institution. Because there is no complete proposal, there is no Commission decision at this time, but rather, as requested by the System, an advisory opinion that we hope will be helpful to you as you develop a formal proposal.

The Commission acknowledges the “serious fiscal difficulties” the state of Connecticut is facing and appreciates CSCU’s desire to engage in “proactive efforts to deal with [the System’s] structural deficit and declining enrollments.” We note with favor the involvement of relevant constituencies in the planning process and are gratified to learn of CSCU’s intention to keep “students first” as it develops a “management plan to put our system on a predictable and sustainable path for the future.” The materials submitted by the System, however, did not address the *Standards for Accreditation* directly and, therefore, the Commission does not yet have sufficient information to be confident CSCU’s process will result in arrangements that are compliant with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

With respect to the proposed consolidation of back-office services, the materials submitted by CSCU identify six “functional areas” the System intends to include in this consolidation: Information Technology, Human Resources, Purchasing, Financial Aid Services, Institutional Research and Assessment, and Facilities Management. As you continue to develop your plans for this consolidation, we encourage you to consult with Commission staff, and we remind you of the need to ensure that the resulting arrangements comply with the following portions of our standards on *Planning and Evaluation; Organization and Governance; Students; Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship; and Institutional Resources*:

Institutional research is sufficient to support planning and evaluation. The institution systematically collects and uses data necessary to support its planning efforts and to enhance institutional effectiveness (2.2).

The chief executive officer, through an appropriate administrative structure, effectively manages the institution so as to fulfill its purposes and objectives and establishes the means to assess the effectiveness of the institution. The chief executive officer manages and allocates resources in keeping with institutional purposes and objectives and assesses the effectiveness of the institution. The chief executive officer assures that the institution employs faculty and staff sufficient in role, number, and qualifications appropriate to the institution's mission, size, and scope (3.12).

The institution's chief academic officer is directly responsible to the chief executive officer, and in concert with the faculty and other academic administrators, is responsible for the quality of the academic program. The institution's organization and governance structure assure the integrity and quality of academic programming however and wherever offered. Off-campus, continuing education, distance education, correspondence education, international, evening, and weekend programs are clearly integrated and incorporated into the policy formation, academic oversight, and evaluation system of the institution (3.14).

The institution ensures that individuals responsible for student services are qualified by formal training and work experience and organizationally placed to represent and address the needs of students effectively. Personnel, facilities, technology, and funding are adequate to implement the institution's student services policies and procedures (5.17).

There are an adequate number of faculty and academic staff, including librarians, advisors, and instructional designers, whose time commitment to the institution is sufficient to assure the accomplishment of class and out-of-class responsibilities essential for the fulfillment of institutional mission and purposes. Responsibilities include instruction, accessibility to students, and the systematic understanding of effective teaching/learning processes and outcomes in courses and programs for which they share responsibility; additional duties may include, e.g., student advisement, academic planning, and participation in policy-making, course and curricular development, research, and institutional governance (6.2).

The institution employs sufficient and qualified personnel to fulfill its mission (7.1).

The institution ensures that it has sufficient professionally qualified finance staff, led by a chief financial officer whose primary responsibility to the institution is reflected in the organizational chart (7.11).

With respect to the proposed merger of the community colleges, the Commission makes the following observations:

1. As noted above, the substantive change proposal regarding the merger will need to describe in detail how the proposed arrangements fulfill each of the *Standards for Accreditation* and therefore do not put the accreditation of the institution(s) in jeopardy. We encourage you to read each standard carefully to note the responsibilities, structures, policies, processes, and systems expected of an accredited institution.
2. The proposal should also include the System's rationale for the change as it relates to the mission and purposes of the Connecticut community colleges. The materials submitted to date have been very clear on the financial reasons for the proposed change but less clear

on a rationale tied more directly to the mission of the colleges. We appreciate the System's goal to retain the "unique mission" and "local community connection" of the institutions and seek further information about how this will be accomplished through the proposed merger.

3. The proposal should include detailed information about projected savings, including specific plans to achieve anticipated savings of \$28 million through the elimination of "levels of non-teaching personnel." In keeping with the portions of the standards cited above, this section of the proposal should demonstrate how proposed total reductions of \$41 million (\$28 million plus the \$13 million from the "administrative consolidation") can be accomplished without undermining the quality of academic programs and services. This section of the proposal should also clarify whether the savings will be used simply to eliminate the deficit or whether – or when – the savings will be used to enhance programs and services. It is not clear from the information presented to date that the anticipated savings will be sufficient to do anything other than eliminate the deficit and, consequently, it is not clear how the proposed merger will result in an improved educational experience for students. Finally, we ask that the proposal also address anticipated additional costs that will be incurred as a result of the merger.
4. We ask that particular attention be paid to the proposed governance structures for the merged institution. What type of campus-based leadership – overall and for each division (e.g., academic affairs, student affairs, finance and administration) – is anticipated? How will academic governance be structured?
5. We further ask that particular attention be paid to the role of faculty in academic governance. We remind you of the expectations articulated in our standard on *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship* that faculty have "primary responsibility for advancing the institution's academic purposes through teaching, learning, and scholarship" (statement of the standard) and, in our standard on *Organization and Governance* that faculty "have a substantive voice in matters of educational programs, faculty personnel, and other aspects of institutional policy that relate to their areas of responsibility and expertise" (3.15).
6. The proposal should also discuss how the System will evaluate the proposed change and assess the effectiveness of the new structure.

Finally, because this review is preliminary and advisory, the Commission reserves the right to request additional clarification or assurances at the time that the System submits its formal proposal for a substantive change.

We understand that CSCU has set a goal of "initial implementation" of its plans by July 1, 2018, and "full implementation" by July 1, 2019. As noted in our Policy on Substantive Change, a copy of which is enclosed for your convenience, the Commission will need to review the System's plans at least six months prior to implementation. You are encouraged to work closely with Commission staff as you prepare your substantive change proposal. Deadlines for submitting materials for Commission review are available on our website: <https://cihe.neasc.org>

The Commission expressed appreciation for the opportunity to review CSCU's materials and to meet with you, Jane McBride Gates, Provost and Senior Vice President Academic and Student Affairs, Merle Harris, Board of Regents member, Erika Steiner, Chief Financial Officer, David Levinson, Norwalk Community College President, and Michael Rooke, Northwestern Connecticut Community College President.

Mr. Mark E. Ojakian  
August 11, 2017  
Page 4

The Commission hopes that this advisory process has been useful to you. It appreciates your cooperation with the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education in New England.

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Barbara Brittingham, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,



David P. Angel

DPA/jm

Enclosures

cc: Dr. Joseph Bertolino, Southern Connecticut State University  
Dr. Paul Broadie II, Gateway Community College, Housatonic Community College  
Dr. John B. Clark, Western Connecticut State University  
Dr. Daisy Cocco De Filippis, Naugatuck Valley Community College  
Dr. Carlee Rader Drummer, Quinebaug Valley Community College  
Dr. Gena Glickman, Manchester Community College  
Dr. Mary Ellen Jukoski, Three Rivers Community College  
Mr. Edward D. Klonoski, Charter Oak State College  
Dr. David L. Levinson, Norwalk Community College  
Mr. James Lombella, Asnuntuck Community College, Tunxis Community College  
Dr. Steven Minkler, Middlesex Community College  
Dr. Wilfredo Nieves, Capital Community College  
Dr. Elsa M. Núñez, Eastern Connecticut State University  
Dr. Michael Rooke, Northwestern Connecticut Community College  
Dr. Zulma Toro, Central Connecticut State University