



Dear Honorable Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee,

I am Fiona Pearson, Chair of the Department of Sociology at Central Connecticut State University. Once our spring term ended in May of 2020, we began the process of preparing for fall. I watched as the California State University system made the decision to move online on May 12, 2020. The Chancellor, Timothy P. White, made that decision swiftly, saying,

This approach to virtual planning is necessary for many reasons. First and foremost is the health, safety and welfare of our students, faculty and staff, and the evolving data surrounding the progression of COVID-19 – current and as forecast throughout the 2020-21 academic year. . . . this virtual planning approach preserves as many options for as many students as possible.

<https://www2.calstate.edu/csu-system/news/Pages/CSU-Chancellor-Timothy-P-Whites-Statement-on-Fall-2020-University-Operational-Plans.aspx>

Faculty in the CSU system, who are dealing with as diverse a student body as we are in Connecticut in our CSCU system, have been preparing high-quality, online classes for their students for the *past three months*. They have been running summer promotions, hosting virtual concerts and t-shirt giveaways and offering flexible deadlines to keep students connected and enrolled. According to one source, "At CSU Northridge . . . as of July 1, 7,043 new undergraduates had registered, which is up by about 1% from the same time last year. Enrollment of continuing students also looks comparable to last year, officials said."

<https://edsource.org/2020/california-colleges-fearing-enrollment-loss-this-fall-are-trying-hard-to-bond-with-students-this-summer/636349>

In Connecticut, the picture is much more bleak. CSCU President, Mark Ojakian, provided one directive—ensure that 40% of classes are on-ground. Faculty, staff, and students must be on campus even though, unlike UCONN, we have no plan for testing, no plan for quarantining, and no plan for when a professor gets sick or worse. Further, we faculty have had no time for planning. For example, in late July, many faculty who preferred and had planned to teach online were informed by administrators that to meet President Ojakian's directive that they must instead teach using a modality called Hyflex. Only yesterday, on August 12 did faculty receive notice about formal training for using the Hyflex modality. In another example, on August 5th, faculty received notice that the CSCU system office purchased BlackBoard Collaborate—a conferencing system tool that has been used successfully in the past by UCONN. In sum, CSCU faculty have been introduced to two new technologies before classes begin in 13 days on August 26.

I am frustrated. I am demoralized. I am fearful. I do not want to go on campus without temperature checks, testing, and quarantining. How can I successfully learn new technologies less than two weeks before classes begin? We did not have to be in this situation. The CSU system in California shows us that quite clearly.

The lack of leadership and planning in our system office is akin to the lack of leadership and planning we are now seeing across the state in our K-12 educational institutions, where each district seems to be doing its own thing, and the teachers I know are similarly demoralized and frightened.

I understand these are difficult times. We can't change what's been done at this point, but I do ask the following. If you cannot assure safe classroom environments for our faculty, staff, and students, then I request that you do not require students nor faculty and staff to put themselves in physical danger. Keep our faculty safe, while allowing them the freedom to teach using modalities that are best for their students and are not imposed from administrators. Thank you for listening and considering these requests.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Fiona Pearson', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

A. Fiona Pearson
Professor, Department of Sociology, CCSU