

Testimony Regarding the Reopening of Universities and Colleges
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
Legislative Office Building
Colleges and Universities Re-Opening Listening Session

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Dear Members of the Higher Education Committee:

Thank you for considering my testimony in regard to the reopening of CCSU. I am a tenured assistant professor of nursing who has been with CCSU since 2012, with over 15 years of teaching experience, in addition to my 29 years of experience as a Registered Nurse primarily in acute/critical care. As of January 1st, I assumed the role of Department Chair, and took on many additional responsibilities and expectations that the arrival of COVID has exacerbated or intensified.

Today is Wednesday August 12th, and as I am sitting here in front of my computer, I find myself almost at a loss how to put into words how stressful this summer has been for myself, the department faculty and staff – as well as for the students. The amount of time I have personally spent on trying to advocate, and working on the various aspects and preparations has been significant. While I am a dedicated educator, I have become increasingly frustrated that as an employee on a 10 month contract with a minimal stipend for the summer work required by Department Chairs (of note is that I have only received part of the stipend as only began receiving in January) - I have spent hours and hours spent away from my children, and the time that was also going to be spent on scholarship activities simply fell to the wayside.

I am frustrated and disappointed in different ways about how the whole process has been managed – and having the involvement of the BOR/Systems Office seems to have only complicated things further. I feel as if so many opportunities to communicate and engage with faculty/department chairs effectively and in a timely manner have been missed – sometimes at the university level, and more often from the systems office. Decisions that directly effect the functioning of the Department, the learning of students have been made FOR our Department. When I emailed the point person for the workgroups at CCSU practically begging to provide information about the needs of the Department, I was summarily dismissed and ignored. One survey was sent out to Department Chairs with a short response time that barely allowed me to begin to share what impact I was worried that the plans might have. While I believe that the SEPS Dean has advocated for the Department whenever possible, ultimately, I know the needs and challenges related to the reopening for our two undergraduate programs and one graduate program.

I was shocked that the nursing program has not been identified as a priority program – while I recognize that all programs and students across CCSU and the entire system are important – the state of Connecticut has and will continue to need nurses to care not just for COVID patients now, but for patients as they suffer the long-term effects of the virus that we have not yet begun to fully understand.

While I recognize that resources are not unlimited across CCSU or the Systems office – I have spent inordinate amounts of time this summer that was simply unnecessary due to mismanagement.

What was discussed in the reopening plan released doesn't seem anywhere near enough to fruition – the short amount of time left between now and the start of the semester is disturbing. Last minute implementation of so many parts of the plan will be fraught with issues – I have prepared my family that they will have even less of my time and attention over the next 6 to 8 weeks.

The lack of planning and/or communication about the planning – as well as a lack of attention to detail – especially in regard to logistics concerns me greatly – for example self-screening that will be expected of students prior to reporting to campus. What about students reporting to off campus experiential learning – for nursing students that will be to various health care institutions? There was a safety team that worked on experiential learning – no one from the Department of Nursing was directly involved or was contacted. In the reopening plan, the section for athletics is twice as long with far more detail than experiential learning.....

At this moment I don't feel confident that when classes start that everything will be in place for students and faculty/staff to be as safe as possible – and have their learning needs be met. In contrast, I am highly anxious that if there is a delay to the start of the semester, nursing students will lose out on clinical experiential learning time in the health care institutions that will begin the week after Labor Day. The time they spend working alongside nurses and other health care providers is invaluable to their development as a professional nurse.

Thank you for your time and consideration