

Sen. Haskell, Rep. Turco and other members of the Higher Education Committee.

My name is David Blitz. I've been a faculty member at Central Connecticut State University for over 30 years, and am currently Chair of the Faculty Advisory Committee to the Board of Regents for Higher Education, and an ex-officio member of the Board. My concern is that the guidance providing a base line for Connecticut State Colleges and Universities is insufficient to assure a successful reopening and continued functioning of those 16 CSCU institutions with on-ground courses. There is a stark contrast between CSCU measures for testing and those proposed at other institutions of higher learning in the state. Let me mention two: Yale will be testing all or almost all students, faculty and staff who have in person interactions; UConn will be testing most. But in CSCU system only residential students and residential hall directors will be tested.

That means that at the four CSU universities (Southern, Central, Eastern and Western) only a minority of students and a handful of staff will be tested; no faculty will be tested. The situation is even worse at the community colleges: no one – not any students, faculty or staff - will be tested. It appears that the rule adopted by the CSCU reopening committee was to test only residential students, and since there are none at the community colleges, no one will be tested. The Faculty Advisory Committee which I chair, and the CCSU faculty senate of which I am a member of the steering committee, have both unanimously passed resolutions of criticism, calling for some form of testing of all students, faculty, and staff over the fall term. Despite local plans which in the case of my university, CCSU, is almost though not quite comprehensive, institutions in CSCU have been limited by Board policy to the following, as detailed in a presentation by its executive to the last BOR meeting (I append the slide to this statement, p. 3 below):

“No testing is recommended for faculty or staff at the universities other than residence hall directors. No testing is recommended for faculty, staff or students at the community colleges.”

As I noted at the recent special and emergency meetings of both the FAC and the CCSU Senate, Yale and UConn are wealthy institutions relative to the CSCUs and can afford extensive testing, assisted by their affiliated hospital and health care services. But that does not explain why the institutions with the highest proportion of low and middle income students, and the highest proportion of minority students as well – the CSCU institutions -- have the least testing. Much has been made in the recent application by CSCU to the regional accrediting agency NECHE that an essential goal of the proposed consolidated community college is to combat racial and class inequities. That does not appear to apply to testing, where the least testing is being conducted where lower income and minority students are most present.

It might be that CSCU lacks the resources to pay for more extensive testing, but I don't think so. Recently CSCU hired an interim president, interim provost, three interim associate vice-presidents and an interim CFO, as well as three regional presidents already hired for a consolidated college which won't exist until 2023. I estimate the cost to be at least \$1.5 million a year, in addition to the more than \$40 million annually spent on administration at the CSCU System Office. When millions of dollars are needed for a priority, that money is available from the aggregate state funding to CSCU. Cannot some funds be found for more adequate testing at the state colleges and universities? I leave the answer to you legislators who determine and oversee that funding.

Please note, I do not wish to attack the individuals involved. Actually, I think the recently appointed “one” community college interim president and interim provost are well qualified academic leaders who are or have been Presidents of successful community colleges – even though I consider the overall plan of consolidation to be misconceived and wrong. This is not an ad hominem attack, but a critique of a short-sighted policy to which I wish to draw your attention. It is not too late to modify the parameters for testing, which I understand has been contracted by CSCU to a third party, Griffin Health Care. They may well be able to scale up testing to an appropriate level, through random testing and pooling, at a reasonable cost. We are all in this covid-19 pandemic together, and I think it best to admit shortcomings and correct mistakes. I append to my comments the resolutions of the FAC to the BOR and the CCSU Senate which deal with additional matters including point of entry monitoring and air quality for academic buildings, working conditions for faculty and staff, and criteria for closing and reopening campuses (p. 2. following).

CCSU Faculty Senate Resolution

The faculty senate at Central Connecticut State University, at an emergency meeting held Aug. 11, 2020 unanimously approved the following resolution on strengthening measures to protect the health of students, faculty and staff for the reopening of campus:

Whereas the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff must be a priority;

Whereas early and widespread detection of COVID-19 infections is widely recognized by epidemiologists as a critical component in minimizing the spread of the virus;

Whereas regular testing will inspire confidence in faculty, staff, students, and the parents of students that the university is doing all that it can to create a safe environment for learning;

Whereas faculty, staff, commuting students, and residential students may all be sources for introducing COVID-19 infections into the CCSU community;

Whereas Yale and UConn and numerous other universities require testing of all students, faculty, and staff in various ways, and require repeated testing over the course of the semester;

Whereas diminished levels of testing for CCSU students, faculty, and staff violates standards of equity;

Be it resolved that the Faculty Senate at CCSU objects to the testing standards established by the BOR in its criteria for reopening, and further recommends that the BOR adopt the five criteria outlined by the Faculty Advisory Committee.

Approved: unanimously, 48 – 0 (with 6 abstentions and 35 non-voting guests) at an emergency meeting of the CCSU Faculty Senate, Aug. 11, 2020

The FAC resolution included in the above resolution is the following:

Resolution of the Faculty Advisory Committee to the BOR/CSCU

Whereas we value the health and safety of our students faculty staff, employees, and the general public, the Faculty Advisory Committee to the Board of Regents for Higher Education (FAC) recommends the following supplementary measures to the existing reopening procedures:

(1) extending virus testing beyond residential students to all students, faculty and staff and establishing a consistent schedule of testing throughout the semester. (See the Courant's July 30th article on testing plans at Yale and Wesleyan, and the Yale-Harvard study it cites for contrast.)

(2) establishing point of entry monitoring at academic buildings for face masks (use and quality), temperature reading, and hand sanitizing; accommodations for those with conditions that exempt them from mask-wearing must not place others at risk.

(3) respecting faculty preferences for mode of course delivery and other duties, and staff preferences for telecommuting; Special consideration must be afforded to those over 65, given the specific nature of our college populations. Presence on campus should continue to be at faculty/staff discretion as conditions change throughout the semester.

(4) providing specific details about procedures for contact tracing, criteria for shutdown and move to remote learning, and conditions for reopening. The method of communication about the details of any such shutdown or reopening must be clarified.

(5) reporting on the adequacy of ventilation systems must be provided for each building that will be used on each campus and deficiencies addressed to ensure equal access to a safe working environment for students, as well as for faculty and staff.

Approved: unanimously by voice vote (with 2 abstentions) at a special meeting of the CSCU Faculty Advisory Committee, Aug. 7, 2020

Monitoring Health

Section focuses on:

- **Testing of students in residential institutions**
- Incoming residential students must have a RT-PCR COVID-19 test within 14 days of arrival on campus.
- **Ongoing testing of students**
- 5% to 10% of residential students and residence hall directors will be tested weekly. This will include random sampling of the population and targeted testing.
- Any student with symptoms will be evaluated and tested as soon as possible.
- Contacts of students who test positive will be identified and tested.
- **No testing is recommended for faculty or staff at the universities other than residence hall directors.**
- **No testing is recommended for faculty, staff or students at the community colleges.**

As presented to the BOR meeting, July 29, 2020