

**Testimony for Listening Session
Reopening of Colleges and Universities
Higher Education Committee
August 13, 2020**

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Members of the *Higher Education Committee*, thank you for the opportunity to address you today, and for your kind attention. I apologize that my schedule did not allow me to testify in person.

Coming up with a plan (or rather a series of plans) to reopen the colleges and universities in Connecticut has been a difficult and challenging task. It is a complex endeavor that should require, at a minimum, to have input from all the relevant stakeholders. This has, most unfortunately, not happened. My experience as a part-time lecturer (also known as an adjunct) may help you understand what a mess this process has been so far.

The *Connecticut State College and University System* (CSCU; of which CCSU is a part) has over 6800 faculty. While most people assume college faculty are full-time, well-paid and provided with generous benefits, this is not always the case. Some 4700 of the faculty in *CSCU* (69% of total), are part-time. We are paid a fraction of the salary our tenured colleagues receive, and we are afforded few or no benefits. Many of us, for example, do not have health insurance through our jobs in *CSCU*. We are hired one semester at a time and have no assurance that we will be hired back in the future. We are not employed during winter break or over the summer in most cases. We provide remarkable affordability and flexibility to the system by virtue of our low compensation and contingent employment status. Most relevant for the purposes of my testimony, we have little and sometimes no input into policies and decisions. This has been the root of the problems I have seen with the reopening process. Part-time faculty have had no say in this reopening process, and decisions have been made with little or no thought as to how those decisions might affect those of us comprising the vast majority of *CSCU* faculty.

Because we are in the middle of a pandemic, many students, staff, and faculty do not feel comfortable being physically on campus. Because of COVID, they would take classes, work or teach remotely if they were allowed. Yet, there is pressure to “open up” the colleges and universities, meaning that some faculty will need to physically be in the classroom. Not everyone will be able to teach remotely. As stakeholders, faculty should have been asked whether they felt comfortable teaching on-ground (on campus, using hybrid / hyflex methods) or remotely (online). Full-time tenure-track faculty were asked about their preferences. Full-time faculty take precedence in course assignment and scheduling, and their preferences have been largely accommodated.

However, part-time faculty were not necessarily asked about their preferences. We have been assigned to teach a disproportionate number of on-ground courses. The fortunate few have

been told they may teach remotely if they can provide a documented health concern or other legitimate reason. Others have been told that if they were unwilling to teach their course on-ground, the course would go to someone else. Part-time faculty like me have been put into quite a bind. I was assigned fewer classes than usual this fall. I felt I could not refuse an on-ground class because I could not risk losing it or future opportunities to teach. I am not comfortable with being on campus because of the small but very real risk of getting COVID and bringing it back to my multi-generational household. Like other part-time faculty, I cannot fall back on sick leave if I catch COVID. I am ineligible. If I am unable to teach, I will lose my class(es). I do not have health insurance provided by my employer, because I am ineligible. I will hope that the plan I am able to afford through Connecticut's ACA exchange will be up to the task, should the worst happen. I was not asked my preference of teaching modality, nor did I receive it. I reluctantly agreed to teach a second on-ground course because a full-time faculty member in my department did not wish to teach it. That full-timer got their preference, and I did not. Many of my part-time colleagues across the *CSCU* system find themselves in the same unacceptable situation during this reopening.

To exacerbate the situation, both of the current teaching modalities (on-ground / hybrid, and online / remote) are considerably more work than typical, old-fashioned on-ground classes. They require far more preparation work and training. Remember that part-time faculty are not paid during the summer. We are doing far more free work than in a usual summer. The extensive training faculty must typically undergo to teach using either of these methods is usually accompanied by a small stipend. Not this summer, and not for part-time faculty. We are being told there is not even minimal compensation available for all this free labor. Add to this that some of us have had to purchase webcams, microphones, high-speed internet, etc. with our own money to make it possible for us to teach our classes. We are told there is no money to reimburse us for these expenses, either. Part-time faculty who wish to teach in the fall are having to do uncompensated work and pay for materials out of their pockets during this reopening.

That said, part-time faculty (at least at CCSU) have not yet received their "contracts" (award letters) for the fall. Classes start less than 2 weeks from today. We get our contracts late many summers, but this summer they are later than usual. Many of us will put in considerable uncompensated time and resources in preparation to teach courses we may not even get. Our assignments are not final until we receive and sign the award letters. Even then, courses can still be taken from us. This is the reality part-timer faculty experience before each semester, but it is worse than usual during this reopening.

The last major issue part-time faculty have experienced during the reopening process is having our unemployment challenged or outright denied by our employer (CSCU and CT DOL). While part-time faculty do have issues getting unemployment in "normal" years, the rules have been relaxed during the pandemic, or so we thought. People who would not normally qualify are receiving unemployment under these unusual conditions. Indeed, the federal government has supplemented the usual unemployment payments during the pandemic. But not for part-time faculty. Even in the midst of this pandemic and the extreme accompanying economic

difficulties, the State of Connecticut has employed a firm called ***Employer's Advantage*** to challenge the unemployment claims of part-time faculty. Even those who successfully received their unemployment are now finding that the money has been cut-off, while the state challenges their claims. Many of them are at risk of having to pay back some or all of the benefits they've received. Part-time faculty are being denied the unemployment benefits all other workers take for granted, during this COVID pandemic and during this reopening.

I apologize for the length of my remarks, but the issues being experienced by part-time faculty during the process of reopening are complex. The move to reopen colleges and universities is understandable. A rush to reopen without the input of all stakeholders and without regard to the impact on all of them is not. The part-time majority of ***CSCU*** faculty have been put in an unacceptable situation. Part-time faculty are certainly willing to do their part to help the colleges and universities move toward. But they should not be asked to choose between putting their health at risk or risking losing their class(es). They should not be asked to teach on ground without access to sick leave or, in many cases without employer supported health insurance. They should not be asked to do a significant amount of uncompensated work, when they are not even certain they will have classes to teach this fall. They should not be denied unemployment at the behest of their employer during a pandemic, when the rules are relaxed for virtually all other workers.

Thank you for your time and attention.