



Education That Works For a Lifetime

At its meeting on January 28, 2008, the Board of Trustees approved the following strategic priorities for the system of Connecticut Community Colleges to serve as the foundation for strategic planning.

Topic: Connecticut Community Colleges Strategic Priorities

Recommended by: Board Chair

Resolved: That the Board of Trustees for the Community-Technical Colleges of Connecticut endorses the strategic priorities identified by leadership councils and through campus discussions as key to expanding the resources and enhancing the capacity of Connecticut's Community Colleges to provide access to educational opportunities and support services that will meet the growing demands of students and the **imperatives of workforce development** and global competition that challenge Connecticut's economy.

Background:

A shared vision of student success has always been the spirit that brings the mission of community colleges to life. That vision has not changed since the founding of our first colleges and our system. It is evident in the core values that differentiate community colleges from other institutions and it is supported by Board of Trustees policies that ensure affordable, accessible, and widely available educational opportunities to help students succeed.

While that vision of student success has not changed, and will continue to be the guiding principle of Board policy and programs, changes have occurred in student demographics, in workforce development, and in the economy of our state and our country that challenge Connecticut's community colleges to expand and invest resources in order to enhance student success.

A recent report on enrollments from the Department of Higher Education noted: "The unprecedented growth in the ranks of full-time students (many of whom are new high school graduates) markedly changed the community college population and poses unique challenges for the system to meet the instructional and support service needs of these students."

Fall 2007 College and University Headcount in Connecticut, November 2007

Therefore, the Board of Trustees expresses its endorsement of the key strategic priorities that have been considered by the Board as recommended by the Council of Presidents and other leadership councils to guide system and college planning efforts. Establishing goals, objectives and strategies for implementation in each of these priority areas will allow the system and individual colleges to advance student success, **serve student and state needs**, expand the resources needed for investment in student success and college capacity to fulfill the community college mission of educational opportunity. Aligning our efforts on the system and college levels to address each* of these priorities will enable us to deliver on the promise of community college education in terms of both access and success.

The involvement of our system and colleges in numerous statewide initiatives has great potential to advance student success in Connecticut. These initiatives will strengthen our efforts and provide valuable support for collaborative solutions that will serve our students, our state and our nation. Among these initiatives are:

- the redesign of high school curricula being undertaken by the Connecticut State Department of Education
- The collaborative agenda of the PK-16 Council and its Know How 2 go campaign
- The expansion of the guaranteed admissions agreement with UCONN and the memorandum of agreement between the community colleges and the Connecticut State University System
- Grant funding from the **U.S. DOL that encourages community college students to enter and succeed in the fields of allied health and advanced manufacturing**
- Legislative initiatives that call for:
 - Plans to increase graduation rates throughout higher education;
 - A study of transfer and articulation agreements and the establishment of common placement standards for college level study;
 - The addition of more full-time faculty and student support staff at our colleges;
 - Additional financial aid for Connecticut public college students;
 - A strategic plan for higher education.

* It should be noted that there is no rank order within or among the priorities listed. But rather it is recognized that all are essential to supporting student success and fulfilling the community college mission and all must be addressed with equal determination.

Meeting the Needs of a Changing Student Population and the Needs of Connecticut's Businesses and Industries for an Educated Workforce.

The unprecedented growth in student enrollment and the dramatic changes in student demographics require the Connecticut Community Colleges to address the changing needs of the student population. It is the responsibility of the system to address the expansion of programs and services necessary to meet the instructional, academic support and student service needs of these students.

At the same time, the State of Connecticut is striving to attract and retain business investment by providing the competitive advantage offered by a talented workforce and a climate that fosters business development. As the demand for well educated employees grows and growing numbers of students seek the opportunities offered by higher education, the Connecticut Community Colleges must be in the position to provide the opportunity for students to gain the knowledge and skills needed to achieve economic self sufficiency, employment opportunities, and an improved quality of life for themselves and their families. The changes in our society are reflected in our student population as seen in the academic and socioeconomic disadvantages that bring challenges for colleges that constantly exceed existing resources and limit the ability of the colleges to be responsive to meeting student and state needs. To address the growing numbers of students and the needs of Connecticut in the preparation of a skilled workforce, it is essential that the changing needs of students and the role of community colleges in addressing those needs receive recognition and the resources needed for the enhancement of the effectiveness for the Connecticut Community Colleges to serve as a "cross cutting foundation of economic development."

Expanding Access to Educational Opportunities by Supporting Student Success

To promote student success our commitment to traditional access must be broadened to include access to the entire continuum of higher education and **employment opportunities**, working **in partnership with** high schools, colleges, universities, and **employers** so that the students who choose community colleges are prepared to succeed in college, to achieve their goals for further education, and **to find opportunities for employment**, independence and self-sufficiency. To do this we must be actively involved and engaged in supporting students in:

- preparing for college
- increasing student retention, completion and graduation rates
- graduating and transferring to advanced levels of higher education
- **entering and advancing in careers by addressing workforce skills gaps**

Maintaining Affordability: Tuition, Financial Aid and Resource Development

Expanding access to success must also be supported by maintaining affordability. Certainly our historic commitment to low tuition and fees and extensive financial aid, core values evidenced in Board of Trustees policies, speaks of notable achievements in this area. But this commitment must be sustained by continuing efforts to ensure the availability of financial aid for the students we serve, the neediest and most needed of Connecticut's students, and through an increased emphasis on resource development to attract private funding to ensure student success. We must maximize the efficient use of all our resources as well as identify supplemental funding sources.

Improving accountability

To be effective, our efforts must be documented and student success must be accurately accounted for. Calls for increased accountability throughout higher education require enhanced data collection, rigorous research, and reliable reporting that will support decision making and demonstrate the effectiveness of our interventions on behalf of student success without relying on anecdotal information. We are striving to create a **culture of evidence** that will measure student success in each of the areas where we are exploring new approaches to engage and support students.

Improving learning and assessment

We must also seek ways to improve the quality of student learning and outcomes assessment by expanding our understanding of how students learn and why they fail. We need to know what are the barriers to learning that need to be eliminated, and what student outcomes, beyond traditional measures, **predict success in the 21st century knowledge economy**. Part of our efforts in this area must be to create opportunities for professional development for college faculty and administrators that will help them to foster success for students through new models of instructional and educational services.

Ensuring a safe, secure, and inclusive campus environment

Another dominant issue on every college campus is the need to promote a safe and secure environment that encourages inclusion and respects diversity. Learning can only take place in an environment where concepts and ideas can be expressed and explored without fear. While a community of learners cannot be isolated from the external world, it can strive to ensure that violence is excluded from its boundaries and that open debate, challenging ideas, and different viewpoints are valued rather than feared.