



August 25, 2008

Dear Community College Colleague,

At this point in August, you are most likely having that “here we go again” feeling, as you prepare for the new academic year, new students, and the fresh start that a new semester brings to your campus. I have the same feeling, but in a slightly different way.

This July we received news of reductions to the community college budgets for the coming year as a result of rescissions ordered for state agencies by Governor Rell. These reductions had been presaged by previous requests from the Office of Policy and Management for reduction plans and restrictions on hiring, travel, and purchasing in the late spring as tax revenues declined and the State’s large budget surplus dwindled. In July, working with the college presidents and administrations, we developed, and our Board approved, plans to accommodate the budget reductions through a combination of savings, fiscal limitations, and use of reserves, much as we did five years ago during the State’s previous economic downturn.

So, to prepare my traditional Back to Campus message for this year, I went back and reviewed the messages I had sent previously in times of economic downturns, with the hope that, in addition to a sense of history, I could also convey reassurance for all of us engaged in community college education that, despite predictions of decline, we have the experience and the will to sustain our educational mission and our ability to serve students.

From long experience in our Community Colleges, I expect that this economic downturn will result in increased enrollment demand as the citizens of Connecticut look for ways to improve their own economic outlook by turning to community colleges for access to the education needed to be competitive in the job market, for new skills for new careers and career advancement. For the last four years in succession we have enjoyed record breaking enrollments in both headcount and FTE across our system. While these enrollments brought additional tuition revenues, they also brought increased demands and costs for services in classrooms, libraries, and laboratories throughout our system. “It was your dedication and hard work that allowed us to meet this historic demand even in an environment of declining resources.” That is a direct quote from one of my previous letters, and I know that we can continue to rely on your dedication and hard work to meet the current challenges as we have in the past.

Another earlier reference to the declining state economy: Various scenarios for savings will be “debated in the drive to offset the decline in state revenues that is predicted for the next two years.” However, the value added by Community Colleges to the lives of students and the economy of the state are more widely recognized now on the local, state, and national level than they were previously. I trust that this recognition which has come in many forms, the State’s investment in community college infrastructure, instructional technology and equipment, the Federal government’s investment of \$6.5 million in Community-Based Job Training grants, and the overwhelming investment of students, particularly new, younger students, that has resulted in the system enrolling one-third more students than it did 10 years ago, will provide ample evidence that Community Colleges deliver positive returns and increased value – most particularly in times of economic downturn.

“By delivering high quality education, information, support services, tools and technology, we help students to learn and to achieve success, and we help communities to problem solve and prosper.” The programs, services and resources provided by community colleges were clearly needed before, and they are even more necessary now. Connecticut’s designation as an “Achieving the Dream” state has brought the attention of national educational leaders and philanthropies to community colleges as the point of entry into higher education for underserved and disadvantaged student populations. Regional forecasts, such as New England 2020, predict a future where population and workforce growth are seen only among minority and immigrant populations who face disproportionate academic achievement gaps that undermine college success and employment advancement.

Connecticut’s Community Colleges are working to effect changes that will encourage success for all students, particularly those facing academic disadvantages, through the implementation of innovative educational programs and recognized best practices based on college-level testing and expanded research on student and institutional performance. The early successes of these strategic interventions are being brought to scale at all system colleges to help more students achieve their goals as indicated by:

- Successfully completing courses with a C or higher
- Advancing from remedial to credit-bearing courses
- Enrolling in and successfully completing required entry-level credit courses including English and Math that are “gatekeepers” for academic advancement and success
- Re-enrolling from one semester to the next
- Earning degrees or certificates.

And some things, including my gratitude to you for all you do to help students succeed, never change: “As a Connecticut Community College employee, it is your effort and commitment that has made your college, your students, and our system successful.” While we are often warned about predicting future success based on past performance, I feel confident that we can meet the current challenges while continuing to serve the needs of students and the State of Connecticut. Your commitment to encouraging student success has enabled us to sustain our mission through difficult times and to grow, not only in size, but in our relationship to the most significant educational issues that confront our State and our nation.

If Connecticut is to have a skilled and well prepared workforce, including its healthcare, emergency services, and manufacturing workforce, then Community College programs must be responsive, affordable and accessible. If Connecticut is to attract business investment and create new job opportunities, its quality of life and its business resources must include access to higher education and lifelong learning. If Connecticut is to maintain its competitive edge in technology, bioscience, precision manufacturing, its public higher education enterprise must address the achievement gap faced by its students and invest in preparing successful, well educated associate degree and certificate graduates. For Connecticut to prosper, community college graduates must be able to enter the Connecticut economy with the abilities needed to secure employment, to advance in their careers, and to keep pace with technological changes as well as changes in the economy.

Once again, I encourage you to share your ideas for improving our educational services as well as statewide and regional cooperative efforts for the good of our students, our colleges, and our system with your college presidents, your college colleagues, and with me. Just as in the past, by working and thinking together, we will find innovative ways to sustain high quality community college education and services to ensure that our students succeed.

I look forward to hearing from you and wish you a most successful 2008-2009 year.

Sincerely,



Marc S. Herzog, Chancellor