

## COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND STUDENT SUCCESS

*Marc S. Herzog, Chancellor*

### **Mission & Vision**

The spirit that energizes the community college movement and brings the mission to life is a shared vision of student success made possible through the opportunities offered by community colleges. That success may be in completing a course, gaining new knowledge, and continuing to graduation, transferring for further study, gaining the skills to compete in the knowledge economy, or becoming more involved in building community and a better life. The educational model of a community college, all the related policies, programs and practices, is built on a vision that sees students as successful.

In 2003, at a time of severely restricted resources, the Board of Trustees for Connecticut's Community Colleges passed a resolution confirming its commitment to preserving the mission of community colleges and the core values that differentiate community colleges from other educational institutions.

### **Core Values**

The Board's resolution called for the preservation of:

- Accessible programs that serve student and community needs statewide;
- Comprehensive services including instruction and student support to promote academic success;
- Low tuition and fees supported by financial aid opportunities;
- Relevant curricula and program development including education and training services for business and industry.

The Board also established guiding principles requiring that:

- Learning will be supported at every level through the best teaching methodology, and the highest quality administrative and instructional technology as an enhancement of teaching and learning.
- Programs, supporting services and technology will be designed around

relevance to student needs, workforce requirements, and fit with accreditation and quality educational standards.

Each of these statements provides evidence of the core values of community colleges that have evolved to meet student needs through policies that sustain access, affordability and aid, program quality and relevance, and essential educational services to advance student success.

### **Succeeding in the Knowledge Economy**

In recent years, public discourse on the national, state, and local levels has come more and more to focus on the ability of our nation's schools, colleges and universities to educate students and to ensure their ability to be successful in achieving their educational, career, and personal goals in the knowledge economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At community colleges across the country, encouraging and supporting student success, in addition to providing access and opportunity, have come to the forefront as primary interests for both college leaders and learners.

### **Success Initiatives**

In Connecticut, our involvement in numerous student success initiatives, including Achieving the Dream, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement, an array of student and institutional assessment efforts have focused our attention on student success in terms of performance, persistence, and program completion, as well as their success in entering and advancing in careers, and progressing to higher levels of education.

### **Priority Issues**

Priority issues identified by the Council of Presidents last year all related to student success. Further campus and council discussions in more recent months have validated these priorities and broadened our traditional focus on providing access to educational opportunities to concentrate on the larger, critical issue of student success.

The framework for the next stages of the System's Strategic Planning efforts will be provided by the five strategic priorities identified by the Council of Presidents, and detailed below, as offering the greatest potential for advancing student success.

Establishing goals and objectives in each of these areas will take place during the coming year and will align efforts on the college and system level to advance student success, serve student and state needs, and expand our capacity to deliver on the promise of community college education.

### **1. 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 through: **curriculum alignment** and early college experiences that address the achievement gap with programs such as dual enrollment, college in high school, and bridge initiatives;
- increasing student **retention, completion and graduation rates** through:
  - redesigned programs and learner-centered methodologies,
  - instructional technology,
  - expanding tutoring and advising,
  - establishing learning communities and success skills programs
- **graduating and transferring** to advanced levels of higher education through:
  - transfer and articulation agreements and guaranteed admissions

- integrated curricula and seamless transitions
- **entering and advancing in careers** by addressing workforce skills gaps through:
  - Short-term training and workforce development
  - Business and Industry partnerships in curriculum development
  - Career counseling and job placement networks
  - Pathways in Allied Health and Bridges to Health Careers
  - Advanced Manufacturing initiatives

### **2. 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 evident 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.

- The expansion of Connecticut Aid to Public College Students in the State's biennial budget for 2008 and 2009 strengthens our efforts to expand financial aid with \$10 million additional dollars available for community college students in each of the coming years.

### **3. 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 evidence. 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.

- The development of a systemwide Data Mart, a policy initiative advanced by Achieving the Dream, will allow more sophisticated institutional research, at both the college and system level, and longitudinal tracking to study student success and support the implementation of promising innovations and best practices.

#### **4. 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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. Enabling our efforts is 2007 legislation that calls for:

- a plan to increase graduation rates;
- a review of existing articulation agreements, and the establishment of placement and progress standards that will support academic success at college-level work;
- A strategic plan for higher education.

#### **5. 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.

#### **Partnerships Advance Success**

Our community colleges are engaged with other institutions and organizations, government and educational leaders, in exploring innovative ways to enhance the potential of all Connecticut students to succeed. These partnerships and initiatives complement our planning efforts and have great promise to advance student success through:

- The redesign of high school curricula being undertaken by the State Department of Education;
- The collaborative agenda of the Governor's PK-16 Council and a public awareness campaign to encourage college attendance;
- The agreement between the Community Colleges and the Connecticut State University System to facilitate transfer among our institutions;
- U.S. Department of Labor funding to encourage community college students to enter and succeed in allied health and advanced manufacturing;
- National success initiatives that are discovering new opportunities in developmental education, high school partnership, outcomes assessment, and student engagement.

Community colleges have grown and been successful and will continue to grow and succeed only in relation to the growth and success they offer for students.