Notes from Transform Town Hall
September 16, 2014
Western Connecticut State University

President Schmotter opened the meeting by briefly describing the work of Drs. Jess House and Paula Secondo, Western’s Transform “liaisons” and then turned the meeting over to Dr. Gregory Gray, President of the CSCU system.

History of Transform.
Dr. Gray provided a brief history of Transform: before he even arrived in Connecticut, CSU faculty were contacting him in response to Governor Malloy’s proposed allocation of a $1.6 billion investment in UConn (http://articles.courant.com/2013-01-31/news/hc-engineering-uconn-0201-20130131_1_dannel-p-malloy-press-conference-uconn-alumnus). After arriving in CT, Dr. Gray met with Governor Malloy, who asked for a plan for CSCU. To decide what should be in such a plan, Gray consulted with the presidents of the 17 institutions and with his executive staff, and Excel CT was created. Excel CT was then presented to the individual campuses. In November 2013, Gray presented the plan to Malloy who objected to the name “Excel”, and the plan became known as Transform. In early 2014, Malloy announced a $125 million investment into CSCU, and repeatedly mentioned that this was a “down payment”. Transform continued to grow, and “became too big for us to handle”, and the Board of Regents hired Boston Consulting Group (BCG) in April 2014 to assist the System with “the plan”.

Focus of Transform
Dr. Gray explained that Transform was focused on maintaining affordability and accessibility, on establishing CSCU as an economic engine and improving student accessibility. Dr. Gray noted that these are congruent with the Board of Regents’ goals for the system, which are a successful first year experience, student success, affordability and sustainability, innovation, and equity.

Why We Should Care About Transform
Dr. Gray explained that we need to “stay ahead of a higher education revolution”, and noted the existence of MOOCs, the recent ruling in California striking down the system of tenure for teachers, and the state of Tennessee providing free tuition for students attending the state’s community colleges.

Further Details About Development of Transform
BCG, Dr. Gray, and the Board of Regents developed a “Value Proposition” during an all-day meeting in August 2014. This Value Proposition will guide decision-making. Link to Value Proposition http://www.ct.edu/files/pdfs/transform-value-prop.pdf

Details of Transform
Dr. Gray explained that the original plan had 31 initiatives, but after feedback from the faculty/staff survey distributed in late May 2014, five initiatives were added so that Transform now includes 36 initiatives that are assigned to executive
“sponsors”. Dr. Gray mentioned that one of these initiatives was a “Transparency” initiative that was necessary because this “is not your typical planning process—we’re moving quickly.” Gray thought that faculty would find the proposed system-wide metrics “intriguing” and further, that these metrics will be used to evaluate Gray’s performance. He anticipated that these metrics will be used to develop report cards for each institution, and that these report cards would be public.

Smart Classrooms
Smart “Genius” classrooms are being developed at all 17 institutions. “E-learning eco-systems” will be created, and a goal of information technology is the portability of classroom innovation across multiple platforms for maximum adoption. Smart classrooms are for “good faculty who are into this technology” and Gray stressed that no one was being forced to use these smart classrooms. He expects a pilot smart classroom to be up and running by Spring 2015 and there to be smart classrooms system-wide by Fall 2015.

Transform and Western
President Schmotter briefly explained the convergences between Transform and Western’s strategic vision. 17 of the initiatives are already being addressed at Western: early college experiences, attention to veterans, recruitment of non-residents, enhanced study abroad opportunities, enhanced graduate student recruitment, improving academic advising, first year experience, academic optimization (streamlining paths for students), faculty development, strengthening the liberal arts core, K-12 alignment, blended/online learning, programs that meet workforce needs, collaboration with business community, a facilities master plan, and state of the art classrooms.

Questions for Dr. Gray
At 3:41 PM, Dr. Schmotter turned the forum back to Dr. Gray for questions from the audience. Dr. Gray began by explaining how this all “becomes real”. There are 7 executive sponsors for the initiatives. Each initiative has a person in charge who will make recommendations to the Executive Steering Committee, consisting of Gray, Chair of the Board of Regents Nick Donofrio, Jay Puckett of BCG, Catherine Smith, Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD), Dr. Shirley Jackson, Professor of Sociology at Southern Connecticut State University and John Rathberger, President and CEO of Connecticut Business and Industry Association. The committee will give a “head shake”, and the initiative leader may or may not be asked to return with modifications. It is unclear what happens at that point. The goal is to have a 50 page report to the Board of Regents by January 2015 and the Board will ask that all stakeholders have the opportunity to look at this document and provide feedback and by March, the BOR will approve the document, and we will have a plan. The next step will be how to execute this plan.

Questions for Dr. Gray, Part II.
Dr. Gray was asked “Are educators really part of this? We fill our classrooms with learners, not audiences” Dr. Gray agreed. Dr. Gray was asked when formal consultation
with the appropriate governance bodies was going to take place. He replied that logistically, it would be extremely difficult to do that by January 2015. He was asked “How is this different from UConn’s Next Generation” plan? Dr. Gray answered that he was not familiar with Next Generation and also mentioned that this was an “undergraduate plan” and “we may need a transform II for graduate education.” He stressed that Transform is a dynamic and evolving document. It was pointed out to Dr. Gray that one of the metrics is graduation rate which might conflict with one of the desires of employers expressed in the employers survey: that our students be able to write effectively. Dr. Gray responded by asking the questioner to get involved and commented that “this is a once in a lifetime activity and they’re going to welcome your input.” A questioner wondered whether Transform adequately addressed the achievement gap in Connecticut, and Dr. Gray urged the questioner to look closer at Transform because it did address that issue. A member of CT Students for a Dream asked about the existing inequities in state financial aid for qualified, undocumented students, and Dr. Gray reminded the student that Transform cannot do everything at once. It was pointed out that graduate education wasn’t addressed adequately in Transform, and graduate education is one of the components that make a university a university. Dr. Gray mentioned that not everything can fit into Transform and that maybe we need a Transform II. Dr. Gray was asked why there was so little attention paid to faculty research, an important component of our careers, and he replied that there was attention to faculty research in the faculty development initiative led by Stephen Adair. The issue of shared governance was raised again, and it was pointed out that formal consultation with individual Senates is not optional. Dr. Gray responded by stating that he was not familiar with the state system of shared governance, that shared governance probably shouldn’t be with individual institutions, but rather with the system, that he’s not sure if he is even legally required to consult with the appropriate governance bodies and finally, perhaps there needs to be a system-wide Senate. It was pointed out that communication about Transform was less than optimal, leaving all of us wondering just what the status of it was.

Dr. Gray then left to return to Hartford.

The meeting ended shortly after that.