



University of Connecticut
Office of the Provost

August 23, 2007

Peter J. Nicholls
Provost and Executive Vice President

for Academic Affairs
Dr. Veronica Makowsky
Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and
Regional Campus Administration

Dear Dr Makowsky:

Thank you for submitting the revised report from the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Task Force. I note that since the original report was sent to me it has been posted on the web for the benefit of the University community, and that much feedback has been gathered both directly and through open forums held in March of this year. This revised report is based upon all of this input and further reflection by the Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Oversight Committee.

I am delighted to know that this report has generated a great deal of interest and discussion on the campus. This is as it should be and reaffirms that our faculty are very interested in their teaching responsibilities, in the linkages between teaching and research, and in resources that the university can make available for the support of teaching. As you note in your letter, the debate about the relationship between teaching and research should and will continue. We do not expect that this revised report constitutes the final word on these important matters but it does constitute an important milestone. For the first time we have written documentation of a set of principles that have guided our thoughts, and we have some excellent recommendations that will certainly lead to improvements in the effectiveness, recognition, and the reward of teaching activities at the University of Connecticut.

I would like to speak to the specific recommendations in the report and will do that in the order in which those recommendations appear.

1. ***Hire at least 175 new tenured and tenure-track faculty (and the complimentary support staff) in order to bring our student/faculty ratio to 15:1 as at our peer institutions.*** We have already made significant progress with the hiring of new faculty and support staff. Through careful budgeting and reallocation, the university and its constituent schools and colleges have been able to hire some 40 new faculty for Fall 2007 and an additional 31 academic support staff. These efforts have also been partly funded through allocation of new faculty resources from the legislature. It is anticipated that for the Fall semester of 2008, we will hire an additional 30 or so faculty members. A process

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has been initiated whereby academic deans may submit priority requests for new faculty lines based upon student demand and research expertise consistent with our academic plan. It is my firm intention to keep this as the highest priority item on the academic affairs agenda over the next 3 to 4 years so that we may during that period realize the 175 new faculty lines.

2. ***Make almost all classrooms high-tech or tech-ready at Storrs and the Regional campuses.*** We have established this as a high-priority program for the coming academic year. We have allocated more than half a million dollars in equipment and capital funding that will enable the rapid conversion of several dozen classrooms at Storrs and the Regional campuses to high-tech or tech-ready status. Associate Vice Provost Keith Barker has developed a plan for the rapid conversion of such classroom facilities and, through creative use of swing space, we are hopeful that we will get this program essentially complete by the end of the academic year.
3. ***Provide resources in personnel, equipment, and time for helping faculty to develop their teaching, to try new methods, and to use various methods of gathering evidence of teaching excellence, such as an improved instrument for student ratings of instruction, teaching portfolios, and peer observations of teaching.*** In response to the original Task Force Report, the Institute for Teaching and Learning developed new programs and a Faculty Development website which provides easy access to all resources offered by ITL: <http://fdp.uconn.edu>. ITL is also reinforcing its programs for the professional development of Teaching Assistants, including International Teaching Assistants (<http://itap.uconn.edu>) and is welcoming Dr. Mary Romney, an expert in ESL, to the staff. Please take a look at these websites where you will find a plethora of opportunities including syllabus clinics, teaching-to-go, hi-tech resources, and individual confidential consultations. New resources can be added when needed by the faculty. We are fortunate to have one of the best teaching centers in the country and will continue to support and enhance it.
4. ***Replace the current student ratings of instruction instrument with a more appropriate reliable and valid instrument.*** The report notes that implementation of this recommendation will require significant work. It contains an example of an instrument and some good ideas for possible formats. I will be forming a committee to study the current instrument and possible changes which could be made. The ideas contained in the report will be invaluable to the work of this committee.
5. ***While a revised and nuanced instrument for student ratings of instruction will be used throughout the university, each academic department should establish its own criteria and procedure for gathering evidence of excellence in teaching that does not rely exclusively on the student evaluations as evidence of good and effective teaching.*** During the coming year I will work with the Council of Deans and through them with department heads across the campus to encourage the development of discipline specific criteria which can be used to gather evidence of teaching effectiveness.
6. ***That every department and program recognize and celebrate good teaching in their ranks, from teaching assistants and adjuncts through full professors, in the ways that they see fit.*** Clearly this is an activity that I fully

support. I will encourage departments to pursue the recognition of good teaching and will point out to them many of the excellent ideas contained in Section 3 of the Task Force report. The celebration of good teaching can and should become a part of the routine in each academic department.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all members of the Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Task Force and of the Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Oversight Committee who have given so much of their time and talent to help the university think about ways in which we can enhance the educational experience of our students. This is important work and it has been advanced significantly through their efforts. They have my thanks and appreciation for a job well done.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Nicholls". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P" and "N".

Peter Nicholls

Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs