



Dear Colleagues:

The start of the new academic year comes at a time when we are confronted with countless challenges in our society. Many of you are concerned, as am I, about the unrest in the world and in our country and what impact that unrest will have in our communities but especially on our campuses. Given the divisiveness in our national dialogue, it is incumbent upon us as leaders of our universities and colleges to reaffirm our mission and collective values and protect the safe inclusive learning environment on our campuses.

The CSCU community is made up of various races, ages, religions, ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, nationalities, physical abilities, and political perspectives. We value our diversity because it enhances our education and provides tools necessary to be culturally respectful, professionally competent and civically responsible. This diversity enriches the college experience and serves as an example for how our common humanity should be respected and cherished.

One of the primary purposes of higher education is to provide a safe campus climate where ideas and opinions are expressed freely. We are a system that greatly values academic freedom and freedom of expression but this freedom we hold so dear requires shared responsibility.

Our national dialogue has been dominated by anger, intolerance and discord. This climate poses a challenge to providing our students with a safe setting to learn and grow. Our role is to encourage vigorous civil debate on the difficult issues facing our society free of fear and personal attacks. College campuses are the place where debate needs to occur in a respectful manner. We do not and will not accept discourse that belittles or demeans those among us.

This moment in our history requires us to deliberately preserve and protect the rights of all to be heard on our campuses. We must continue to be an academic system that applies and shares knowledge in an open and inclusive environment. And we must continue reaffirming our core mission to provide an affordable and accessible education, filled with rigorous, innovative programs to help students achieve personal and professional success.

I know very well that you are aware of all this. I have watched you lead by example and demonstrate what it means to listen and engage respectfully. I ask that we continue to show respect for each other's personal beliefs even when they do not coincide with our own. As you all know, learning cannot occur without listening and sharing ideas. Our students need to understand that treating others with respect when there is disagreement is difficult but critical to ensuring safe, secure and productive conversation.

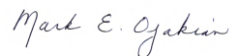
As leaders on your campuses you have one of the most important and valued jobs in the world. You are the caretakers of our institutions, the role models and mentors for our students. You are the ones who will educate our students about the impact of unrest in our world and lead discussions on the effect of political and economic decisions on our society. You will remind them of lessons learned from past history and point them to ways they can support one another through campus activities and community engagement.

Education is the great equalizer and we are all agents of that equity. This is a critical moment in our history and we must all rise to the occasion. We must, once again, come together as a larger community and not let fear, anxiety, and division overpower our ability to open our minds to meaningful discourse. I am so honored to lead this system during this moment and to work alongside each of you in supporting our students in the year ahead. Together we can make a difference.

I intend to visit campuses frequently during the fall to personally deliver this message to as many students as I can. I ask that you consider opportunities for me to do that, whether it be in open forums or in your classrooms.

Thank you again for your support as we work together for our students. I look forward to an amazing academic year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mark E. Ojakian".

Mark E. Ojakian, President  
CT State Colleges and Universities