



Dear Students,

Welcome to the new school year! Whether you're coming back, or joining us for the first time I want to wish you a productive and inspiring year. As this September also marks my one year anniversary and given everything going on in our world today, I want to take a moment to share some personal reflections but also ask for your help on something very important.

Immediately after I began in September of last year, I went on a listening tour. I visited each and every campus and spent the entire day hearing from students, faculty and staff and at times members of the surrounding community.

I learned that the CSCU community is made up of various races, ages, religions, ethnicities, gender identities, physical abilities, political perspectives among other attributes. Our diversity is a core value, one that provides a rich learning environment that will help you become culturally respectful, professionally competent and civically responsible. This diversity enriches the CSCU college experience and serves as an example for how our common humanity should be respected and cherished.

I believe college is a time and place to explore new concepts and to share ideas. Sharing ideas also means engaging in debate and participating in conversations where everyone does not agree. I know how difficult it is to listen when you're on opposite sides but it is one of the most important skills you can learn. We are a system that greatly values academic freedom and freedom of expression but this freedom we hold so dear requires shared responsibility.

So what I am asking is that you listen to one another and show respect for each other's personal beliefs even when they do not coincide with your own. Free speech in the context of learning and spirited debate are essential but personal attacks are not. We should not accept any behavior that belittles or demeans each other.

The ability to have conversations when there is fundamental disagreement and emotions are high, is a critical skill that will prepare you for the modern world, no matter what your personal or professional goals are. This fall semester, I will be visiting each campus to hear more about your thoughts on this. I also invite you to reach out to me directly at [cscu-president@ct.edu](mailto:cscu-president@ct.edu) or to use #ihearyou to share your ideas.

I took this position to move our system forward. But what grounds me is my belief in you and in the value of public higher education. I am inspired by you, the work you're doing, and in the sacrifices you're making.

I want to congratulate you for pursuing your education and I look forward to seeing you at your commencement and hearing about your continued success in the years ahead.

Thank you and have a great year!

Sincerely,

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

Mark E. Ojakian, President  
CT State Colleges and Universities