

The Salt Lake Tribune

Why The Regents Should Support CEU

There has been a lot of talk lately about saving the College of Eastern Utah. We don't often make the big city news, so the attention is appreciated, but, to quote Mark Twain, rumors of our demise are greatly exaggerated.

CEU is successful on many fronts – three out of every four students from our service region who seek a college degree, enroll at CEU and many transfer on to our sister institutions with great success. Vocational students in our nursing, welding and automotive repair programs consistently receive national recognition. The Blanding Campus is expanding service throughout the Four Corners region, including the Navajo Nation. CEU is financially sound—we are pared to the bone, to be sure, but we weathered the recent budget cuts to higher education without furloughs or firings. Last year the college received a commendation from its accrediting body for our timely and effective financial reporting and business practices.

These successes (and many more) demonstrate that CEU has the talent on campus to address the college's most pressing issues. So what is prompting all the discussion about merging CEU with other institutions? It isn't that CEU is not doing its job well—the problem is that CEU needs to be doing the great job that it does for more students. As Commissioner Sederberg has said, "there is no sense that things are bad or wrong," but a shrinking population of school-age children in southeastern Utah has meant declining enrollments at CEU.

Last week we heard Michael Petersen, executive director of the Utah Education Network, propose a merger between Utah State University and the College of Eastern Utah. Dr. Petersen wants to create a regional university so that folks down here can get 4-year and graduate degrees without having to leave home for schools west of the Wasatch. Nice idea, although in a time of shrinking state budgets and rising educational costs, perhaps a bit ambitious. But here is what really concerns us about Dr. Petersen's report. It states the proposed affiliation with USU "will not solve a number of key challenges [CEU] faces," including the big problem of enrollment. If the merger will not address the key challenges facing the college, we feel that it is critical for the Regents to adopt a plan that will put CEU on the path to long term viability.

The viability plan should begin with the Regents appointing a permanent president for the college and the governor filling vacancies on the CEU Board of Trustees. Dr. Petersen's report faults CEU for failing to implement a strategic plan. However, for the past year the college was held back with an interim presidency and multiple vacancies that made it almost impossible to even have a quorum. The result is a year wasted that could have been dedicated to moving the college forward.

Like small, rural colleges all across America, CEU struggles for a place within a higher education system dominated by urban economic and political interests. The College has the talent to turn CEU into a model for the nation on how to provide higher education in a rural area--all we ask from the Governor and Regents is that they put in place the leadership tools we need to get down to work. We are ready and willing to join our colleagues around the state in exploring ways to make higher education accessible and affordable to all Utahns. But first things, first: appoint a permanent president for CEU now.

Troy Hunt

President, CEU Faculty Senate

The Salt Lake Tribune

Dear Editor,

We are very pleased by the thoughtful discussion at the Utah Board of Regents meeting on Friday about the proposed merger between the College of Eastern Utah and Utah State University.

The Regents choose not to act on Commissioner Sederburg's recommendation that the "basic principles" of Dr. Petersen's proposal be endorsed. Instead, they wisely voted to set up their own task force to undertake a fact-based evaluation of the challenges facing CEU. It was encouraging to hear that the task force will seek a solution keyed to a clear-eyed assessment of the issues.

It was also very heartening to hear the Regents express a strong commitment to community college education in the state. Two-year colleges are the key to providing access and affordability in a higher education system that is increasingly costly to taxpayers as well as students and their families. This is especially important to us in rural Utah.

The Regents have promised to act quickly. We realize that some tough decisions lay ahead, but with the support of the Regents, CEU is capable of doing what needs to be done.

Sonnet Gravina

Vice President, CEU Faculty Senate



Sun Advocate

Carbon County's premier local newspaper since 1891

The College of Eastern Utah has been an important part of this community for more than 70 years. But the College now sits at a crossroads. We are searching for the best route toward a sustainable future.

CEU is fiscally sound and academically successful. Recent budget cuts have hurt, but we have managed them without having to fire or furlough employees and the College is operating in the black. We are fully accredited with a number of nationally award-winning programs. The education we provide is outstanding, as legions of our graduates who have gone on to successful careers and productive lives will testify.

However, enrollment at the College has dropped. This is due, in part, to the declining number of college-age people in our regional population. Since CEU draws the vast majority of its students from high school graduates in Carbon, Emery, Grand, and San Juan counties, the decreasing number of young people has had a serious impact on the College. In order to respond to these conditions, the College must come up with new ways of doing business.

As we consider making changes at CEU, it is worth keeping in mind what it is that community colleges do and why they are so valuable to our society. Small community colleges throughout America, including those in rural areas like CEU and Snow College, have a long, proud history of educating local residents, young and old, contributing to the regional economy, and serving as community hubs for social and cultural activities.

Which choices will best preserve this tradition? What place should rural colleges have in a higher education system dominated by urban politics and interest groups? How can CEU adapt to changing population, economic, and technological conditions while honoring the rural lifestyles and regional heritage that we hold so dear?

Finding the right answers to these questions will not be easy. Some tough decisions lay ahead. The College needs the advice, support and good will of its friends and neighbors. Working together we can ensure that the people of southeast Utah will continue to have affordable access to all the services that a comprehensive community college provides. Our children and our community deserve nothing less.

Betty Hassell

CEU Faculty Senate

Susan Neel

CEU College Senate