

2020 Shea Lecture Series
Economic and Racial Disparity and Solutions

*Sponsored by the Charter Oak State College Foundation
and the Dr. Bernard D. Shea Endowment Fund*

Systemically limited from the onset of our nation, the black, brown, and native members of our communities began behind the starting line, and though running to catch-up (economically), barriers remain in education, policies, neighborhoods, and mindsets that keep equality just a dream. Inequity keeps generations of people stuck in less than humane circumstances.

Solutions begin with understanding and are developed through collaboration.

This year the Charter Oak State College Foundation sponsored a three-part lecture series, free to the public and honoring Dr. Bernard D. Shea, the College's first President, that focused on Economic Disparities and Solutions.

The Foundation partnered with the West Hartford Chamber Minority Business Network to invite a collection of knowledgeable speakers to address the various issues associated with economic disparity. The resulting series was a rich and insightful discourse into racial injustice and its adverse impact as expressed through lenses of the key economic pillars in our society, e.g., Education, Housing, Business and Community Development, Healthcare, Financial and overall well-being.

Charter Oak State College and the Foundation are deeply grateful for the **panel of subject matter experts** who shared their intellect to help us better understand the dynamics of the problem, but more importantly to challenge us to seek meaningful change to the narrative.

The Guest Speakers included:

Seila Mosquera-Bruno, Charter Oak Alum and Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Housing

Glendowlyn Thames, Deputy Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development

Dr. Wilfredo Nieves, President Emeritus, Capital Community College

Dr. Brooke Palkie, Chair, Health Science and Technology Department, Charter Oak State College

Jason Jakubowski, Charter Oak Faculty and Foundation Board Member, President & CEO, Foodshare

Tiffany Donelson, CEO & President, Connecticut Health Foundation

Christopher Clarke, Financial Advisor, Merrill Lynch and Chairman of the Connecticut Chapter of Bank of America's Black Professionals Group, and the Minority Business Network of the West Hartford Chamber of Commerce

Dr. Fred McKinney, Keynote Speaker, Carlton Highsmith Chair for Innovation and Entrepreneurship and the Director of the People's Bank Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Quinnipiac University School of Business

The **board members** instrumental in the lecture series include, **Tracy Allen**, Owner and Social Enterprise Impact Strategist of TVA Consulting who served as the moderator for the series, illuminating the discussion with relevant and timely conclusions. **David Calibey**, owner of BigThink provided design expertise, and the energy to bring the series to fruition by including the West Hartford Chamber of Commerce team and minority designers to work on the project. **Glenn Davis**, First Vice President, Community Development and CRA Officer of Liberty Bank had the inspirational idea for the Shea Lecture series and provided the necessary insight for creating a solution-based discussion as well as a familiarity with our panel of experts.

Carol Hall, COSC Foundation Executive Director was instrumental in the coordination and planning of the series, while **Brandee Stefano**, COSC Assistant provided the administrative support. **Chris Conway**, Executive Director, of the West Hartford Chamber of Commerce familiar with the partnership approach to solutions brought his team onboard to lead the forum. **Jessie Boulier** and **Kate Kobs**, served as host and technical experts, providing the platform, the chatroom interaction, and insightful perspectives for the discussion.

Finally, COSC **President Ed Klonoski**, volunteered to bring all the material together, to showcase the issues as well as the solutions, to accentuate the actionable collaborative steps to make a difference and a dent in the long-standing issue of disparity.

Each speaker was challenged to address their topic to explain why it is a significant cause of economic disparity and suggest concrete steps we can take to alleviate or end it. All three sessions were recorded, and participants submitted some of their thoughts in writing. This White Paper was created from the collaboration of the expert panel submissions and presentations. It is our hope that suggested solutions found here within will move the needle forward in Connecticut and moreover, the U.S., surrounding economic and racial disparity.

The common narrative found throughout the lecture series highlighted a few common themes no matter the subject, such as:

1. Education is imperative, across the spectrum on a variety of topics at all ages
2. Data collection and analysis is critical
3. Community members are essential and should be included in discussions
4. Listen, learn, and expand our personal circle beyond our own race and culture
5. Acknowledge inequity and systemic racism, no one problem is a stand-alone issue
6. Parity as a priority, pledge equality in housing, education, food, healthcare, and opportunity
7. Collaborate and share resources to eliminate issues and policies that perpetuate inequity

The Objective

Glenn Davis eloquently stated the objective of the 2020 lecture series in his closing remarks, printed here in its entirety.

“The overall objective of the Shea Lecture initiative is to provoke critical thinking and dialogue among students and the broader community concerning crucial social issues. Beyond simply being a forum for discussion, this year’s forum is intended to be a ‘Call to Action!’ In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the racial divide, the widening wealth gap and the injustice within our criminal justice system as it relates to the treatment of black and brown Americans, this series sought to challenge our audiences to be actively engaged in solutions. Charter Oak State College President Ed Klonoski will issue a ‘White Paper’ report articulating the complexities of the issues surrounding disparities, but also highlighting real solutions. This White Paper will be submitted to our elected officials and outline a plan for leveling the playing field with actionable steps and requests.”

“In their primer about racial and economic inequities in the United States against the backdrop of COVID-19, The Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco (FRBSF) defined racial equity as the ‘just and fair inclusion in an economy in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.’ The FRBSF then proceeds to make a powerful declaration, ‘We will know we have achieved racial equity when race no longer predicts life outcomes!’ That is the challenge before us but also the opportunity.”

“In his book entitled *Equality*, Richard Henry Tawney, a 19th century British economist writes ‘To criticize inequality and to desire equality is not, as is sometimes suggested, to cherish the romantic illusion that men are equal in character and intelligence. It is to hold that, while their natural endowments differ profoundly, it is the mark of a civilized society to aim at eliminating such inequalities....as have their source not in individual differences, but in its organization!’”

“The matter of racial inequity is not a new phenomenon but can trace its history to the founding of the nation. Its legacy is intentional and deliberate by virtue of its structure! The Shea Lecture series therefore endeavors to be a stimulus for change by invoking intellectually honest and thoughtful discourse. I am appreciative for the outstanding colleagues that serve with me on the COSC Foundation Board and to the wonderful leadership and staff at the West Hartford Chamber of Commerce. Thank you for embracing this topic without hesitation and for bringing your creative and authentic selves to this platform.”

“Finally, and in closing, I’d like to extract a quote from the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s letter written from a Birmingham jail, which I believe befits the times we live. Dr. King eloquently states,

“In a real sense all life is inter-related. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be and you

can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the inter-related structure of reality."

Glenn concurred that the Shea Lecture Series should compel us as it did Dr. King in that, "this is the basis of our challenge, but it also serves as the impetus of our opportunity!"

The Lecture Series:

Keynote / Opening Remarks: Dr. Fred McKinney

The 2020 Shea Lecture series began with a Keynote presentation from Dr. Fred McKinney.

His career and passion provided insight into the historical origins of economic disparity in our state and our country. He began the series by reminding us all that our country was founded flawed. Dr. McKinney stated that in 2020 our country was "literally on fire," making this moment the appropriate time to discuss the topic of economic disparity and Charter Oak State College, the appropriate place.

The basis of our constitution was freedom from tyranny, that all were created equal and shared the equal right to pursue prosperity and happiness. However, the negro man born into slavery was not counted as a whole person in the US Constitution, the negro was 60% a person. The woman – was not considered at all.

Economic disparity is determined by history and economic forces. Education, Housing, entrepreneurial opportunities, and healthcare all play critical roles in disparity. Right here in Connecticut, we have one of the highest incomes in the country, but our school systems are for all intents and purposes still "segregated."

Not only does education play a critical role in wealth disparity, housing does also. Home ownership creates equity by providing a basis for wealth.

When President Franklin D. Roosevelt stated in 1937 that one third of our nation is ill-housed, ill-clad, and ill-nourished – our nation was mobilized as it affected all our citizens. However, in this new century we are still battling disparity for our black and brown community members. McKinney implored that "the solution to economic disparity will be determined by political forces."

The primary goal of eliminating economic disparity based on race was championed by Dr. Martin Luther King in 1967. However, from the founding of the country and the effect of racism through the Jim Crow era, our black countrymen and women have been held back and suffered for 85% of our nation's history. The economic racial wealth gap will not close naturally, it is a matter of fact. The math speaks for itself. We within our communities, state, and nation, collectively, need to make a focused effort to understand the issues and work towards the solutions.

Dr. McKinney briefly mentioned "restitution" – acknowledging it as a basis for closing the gap, but not a solution in itself. He closed his opening remarks hopeful that the panelists would interject on the topic of economic and racial disparity, emphasizing solutions.

Professor McKinney earned a B.A. in Economics from the University of California, Los Angeles, and a Ph.D. in Economics from Yale Graduate School of Economics. While pursuing his Ph.D., Dr. McKinney spent two summers at the Rand Corporation on domestic economic policy and one year on the White House Council of Economic Advisers. In 2001, Dr. McKinney became President and Chief Executive Officer of the Connecticut Minority Supplier Development Council (CMSDC). Dr. McKinney and his team built the CMSDC into one of the largest councils in the network. During his tenure, the CMSDC became the Greater New England Minority Supplier Development Council. While at CMSDC, Dr. McKinney executed two non-profit acquisitions, raised millions of dollars in public and private foundation support, and grew the Council's staff from three to 16 full-time employees. He left CMSDC to serve as managing director of minority business programs at the Tuck School of Business. Dr. McKinney is now the Carlton Highsmith Chair for Innovation and Entrepreneurship and the Director of the People's Bank Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship at the Quinnipiac University School of Business.

Housing: Commissioner Seila Mosquera-Bruno

In her remarks to the Shea participants, Seila Mosquera-Bruno, the Connecticut Commissioner of Housing and Charter Oak graduate, explained that her team is working to increase access to stable and affordable housing for the entire state. The average citizen should spend 30% of their income towards housing that is affordable. Plus, a primary wealth building tool is home ownership. Creating a mix of housing opportunities ensures "everyone" has access to economic opportunities.

She argues that the following overarching goals should organize that effort:

- Work to Ensure Decent Housing is Available to All
- Work to Ensure that All of the State's Residents Live in a Suitable Living Environment
- Work to Ensure that All of the State's Residents Have Access to Economic Opportunities

Methods for achieving these goals include the following:

1. Implement a Balanced Approach to Capital Investment
 - Neighborhood Revitalization Investment in our Urban Centers, in coordination with other agencies, including DECD, Education, Transportation, Energy and Environmental Protection
 - New Construction in High Opportunity Communities
 - Provide a collaborative down payment and low interest home ownership program
 - Rehabilitation/Preservation Investment amongst our Existing Affordable Housing Stock, providing quality and energy efficiency
 - Work with the communities to provide safe and efficient improvements in the existing housing
 - Simultaneously provide opportunity for employment and growth
 - Activities designed to offer new opportunities for homeownership, as well as to help promote ownership stability
 - Work with government agencies, corporations, and non-profits to collaborate resources and assistance for homeownership and sustainability

2. Continued Commitment of Resources to Prevent and Address Homelessness
 - Sustain the State Rental Assistance Payments program
 - Create and implement opportunities around homeless prevention
 - Again, a collaboration of resources between government agencies, corporations, and non-profits to prevent homelessness and provide sustainable solutions
 - Have homeless community members participate in the ongoing discussion of solutions.

3. Promote Community Development, including economic stabilization and infrastructure investment in our smaller towns/cities
 - Provide access to a planning tool kit
 - Bring community members to the table to ensure the plan addresses the community needs
 - Learn from examples, such as the creation of a food co-op in the New Haven public housing arena

Commissioner Mosquera-Bruno emphasized the need to remove the divide and provide equal opportunity within our communities. Without adequate housing, the basis for healthy socialization is defeated before it begins. Data shows that homelessness “disproportionately impacts people of color, particularly those in Black/African American communities. In Connecticut, Blacks/African Americans account for over 30% of people experiencing homelessness, but only represent about 10% of CT’s general population” (CCEH).

Mosquera-Bruno also believes we can close the wealth gap by educating and investing in our community members by providing adequate housing, newly funded and informative homeownership programs, and even career mentorship programs. In November of 2020, a collaborative project funded by \$1.65 million in state grants from the Connecticut Department of Housing, as well as private-public partnerships, under the direction of the Meriden Housing Authority was completed in an effort to help end veteran homelessness ([Record-Journal](#)).

Also, in Greenwich, phase one of affordable housing was completed. Mosquera-Bruno recognized the need in the community, saying, “We need more homes like these, affordable to families with limited incomes. We all know how difficult it is to build homes with affordable rents, especially in Fairfield County; however, the completion of phase one shows that it can be achieved.”

The Commissioner talked about affordable housing in the State of Connecticut in both urban and suburban communities, and the need “to ensure that Connecticut residents can choose where to live, regardless of income” ([Record-Journal](#)).

Mosquera-Bruno also noted that she is encouraging young women of diverse cultures to consider a career in housing and economic development. Her own career opportunities grew as her knowledge and credentials increased. Seila was appointed by Governor Ned Lamont to the Department of Housing. Prior to her appointment, Seila was the President and Chief Executive Officer of NeighborWorks® New Horizons. NWNH is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to providing affordable housing opportunities to help build strong communities and revitalize neighborhoods.

Seila has a Master's degree in Urban Studies from Southern Connecticut State University, and a Bachelor's in Business Administration from Charter Oak State College. She completed the Achieving Excellency in Community Development 18-month fellowship program at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. However, she explained that within the housing and economic development arena, she is typically one of few minority women in leadership across our nation.

Economic and Community Development: Glendowlyn Thames

According to Glendowlyn Thames, Connecticut's Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD), the state's efforts to reduce economic inequality must begin with improved data collection. Viable communities consist of a variety of elements, access to healthcare, food, housing, workforce development, transportation, a variety of job opportunities, and a strong educational system. Solutions need to move the needle and making data collection a priority will help track the market gaps. Tracking demographics will help to intentionally target resources.

For example, DECD is investigating the impact of COVID-19 on the Black business community in relation to the relief funds in order to establish awareness of the disparity and implement inclusion solutions going forward. Economic disparity requires that we document differences in order to address underlying causes.

Second, the department is encouraging businesses to create equity teams that will intentionally reduce gaps for minority businesses. This approach will employ parity pledges aimed toward targeted goals. For example, DECD is asking anchor institutions, major employers in Connecticut, to make parity pledges. To pledge to invest 2% of their net income back into the community to help reduce economic disparity by creating infrastructure, food, housing and opportunities. So far, the response is encouraging.

The department is also engaged in conversations with members of the communities who are informing solutions, being part of the process empowers the community members. This avoids the "one size fits all" approach to solving these problems. An interesting example is urban agriculture, where "food deserts" are solved by encouraging city residents to grow their own supplies. Or encouraging community members to shop local and support black and brown business owners, keeping resources within their own community.

Deputy Commissioner Thames stated that to "unleash economic stimulus we must work together, understand the state of play, and combine access to capital with access to the conversation."

Education: Dr. Wilfredo Nieves and Dr. Fred McKinney

Dr. Nieves shared his personal sense of urgency regarding educational inequity and the work that must be done to confront the systemic issues, especially now that he is in his retirement years. The basis of change begins with an understanding of the need and programs to address such need. However, funding is always an issue, because so many efforts to focus on disparity in education begin with special funding or grants, making the programs non-sustainable. As the program may bring about lasting change, the funds are not always "lasting."

We need to find ways that are going to be sustainable and ways that are going to be “vast.” The minority challenges are legacy challenges – disparities in education for our minority students are the same issues we have been challenged with for years. The minority communities and students traditionally have the same struggles at the higher education and at the public elementary and high school levels – the issues of not having advocacy, not having the appropriate curriculum, or faculty and staff that are cognitive of individuals of color. Or, an understanding of the challenges, strengths, and weaknesses plus the experience and cultural wealth that students of color bring to our institutions.

As we look at solutions, Dr. Nieves considers the need to provide opportunity through access – vocation and location. So many students of color cannot access college because of their location or their access to technology. First, we must address the basic issues, we need to partner and work with the school systems in their communities and with the corporate sectors. Broadening the access to quality education and exposure to career opportunities.

Students in community colleges are the most vulnerable members of our society. Typically, they will need financial, social, physiological, and career planning support. As we plan for our minority students, we need to be cognitive that these students may not have access to support, role models, and technology. Plus, many may not understand the opportunity that is available to them.

A strategy implemented at Capital Community College was the first center, a financial literacy center that helped students become financially independent and literate. Course work was created to identify and develop the skill set and tools necessary for the ethnicity of the student base, minority – Black and Hispanic students.

Dr. Nieves believes that “we must begin at the early education level and have black and brown students become consumers of the educational systems, from early on through higher education.” To invest in life coaches and mentors to help students understand their interests with sustainable career paths is another step towards bridging the gap.

Dr. McKinney also agreed that we need to realize the importance of education – as the key to the solution. The educational component is critical, and we need to begin to put in place steps that are future oriented. He also concluded that we are missing an opportunity in our public education to teach kids how to earn and use money. Consider money as a tool! If you teach kids how to make money at an early age – they will learn math, geography, communication, and most likely learn how to earn and manage money.

The focus of our educational system should encourage the use of money as a tool. To provide basic life skills to students and access to information they may not have at home.

Financial: Christopher Clarke

Christopher Clarke works as a wealth advisor and serves on a variety of boards. He strongly agrees that poverty is tied together with opportunity, education, housing, health, job growth, and access to food. Education may be the one key to unlock individual potential and provide a stable groundwork for personal development and growth. Education in a variety of topics, not only academic education. Also, financial planning and network and net worth development.

A few concrete steps we can take as individuals is to:

1. Acknowledge disparity exists and have the difficult conversation
2. Expand our personal network to include individuals of varying backgrounds, color, and culture
3. Promote mentorship and help open doors for opportunities
4. Invite persons of color to serve alongside (you) on boards and in volunteer positions
5. Become corporate citizens

Clarke went on to explain the corporate citizenship model displayed by Robert F. Smith, Founder, Chairman and CEO of Vista Equity Partners. Committed to removing inequality with an investment of personal and financial support, Smith displays a consciousness to eliminate poverty. In 2017, Mr. Smith was the only African American to sign the Giving Pledge. In his pledge, Mr. Smith committed to investing half of his net worth during his lifetime “to causes that support equality of opportunity for African Americans, as well as causes that cultivate ecological protection to ensure a livable planet for future generations.” That same year he was named by Forbes as one of the 100 Greatest Living Business Minds ([VistaEquity](#)).

Clarke believes in the power of social impact, on investing ongoing energy and resources to solve a problem. Bank of America provides a platform for investment but also is committed to equality and sustainability. The actions of corporate America as well as corporate citizens will work in tandem to move the needle of disparity towards equality.

Healthcare: Dr. Brooke Palkie and Tiffany Donelson

The next topic addressed was the social determinants of health and the need to integrate a whole-person approach to healthcare. According to **Brooke Palkie**, Chair, Health Science and Technology Department at Charter Oak, we need to fundamentally change the culture in healthcare; but first, we need to standardize how we define complex social and structural factors. These intangible factors don't always have a physical presence. Remember, the conditions in which we live in part explains why some are healthier than others and why some are not as healthy as they could be. If we can't standardize those factors, it's difficult to move forward collectively.

Unfortunately, significant variations in criteria and assessment tools currently exist without the direction of national standards. This fundamentally restricts the ability to communicate with actionable information. One foundational step would be to use the U.S. Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Healthy People 2020, SDOH Domains as the standard terminologies and definitions. At a high level, these include economic stability, education, health and health care, neighborhood and built environment, and social and community context. Once we have defined standardization, we can then begin to move toward bridging the social determinants criteria with healthcare standards.

Healthcare organizations need to be agile and continue to move forward by collaborating at all levels of public health. Good health is not only aligned to health care but also to education, childcare, housing, business, law, media, community planning, transportation, and food. Health systems, payers and vendors must collectively incorporate factors that impact a patient's care outside of the typical medical setting to allow for the creation of achievable objectives for improving the total view of

health. Population health programs need to be partnered with to identify the overall management of patient-centered care that provides social and physical environments which promotes good health for all.

But where do we start? It is going to take very thoughtful coordination, but we don't exactly need to reinvent the wheel. Federally Qualified Health Centers, Healthypeople.gov, WHO, the National Partnership for Action to End Health Disparities, and the National Prevention and Health Promotion Strategy already exist and are working to standardize the capture and use of social determinants of health data.

The nation's first successful statewide technology platform is a public-private partnership between North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS) and the Foundation for Health Leadership & Innovation (FHLI) which created NCCARE360 in order to coordinate wholistic care by collaborating traditional healthcare with non-medical drivers such as food, housing, transportation, safety and employment. The technology platform, via Unite Us, is available in all counties and anyone in North Carolina can request and be connected to an accountable organization to support the specific needs. This is accomplished through health – community organization electronic referrals. More than 1,000 organizations in the state have joined the network to connect people to the right resources and follow through to ensure accountability and to track and close the feedback loop on the assessment of those outcomes.

Dr. Palkie concluded that “initiatives need to be driven by collaboration and coordinated policy in order to positively influence health, social and economic conditions at a broader scale. The goal is to provide the right resources to the right person at the right time to enhance a person's quality of life which significantly influences population health outcomes.”

Tiffany Donelson, President and CEO of Connecticut Foundation for Health also discussed health equities within Connecticut. In agreement with Dr. Palkie she emphasized the goal to promote policy and legislation that meet the need of the whole person. To gather data across systems is a start to understanding the problem. For example, emergency room visits, tied together with lack of access to nutritional food, healthcare, safe housing, and financial stability. Poverty and race are also tied together, and disparity is persistent and will continue to widen if we don't acknowledge the “facts.”

A solution would be to gather data across systems, incorporate the health, care, and food data for example to begin to improve solutions particular to communities or populations that suffer from poverty. Donelson explained “when we work to help the “least of them” we work to help our communities as a whole. Improvement in livelihood directly impacts improvement in health and social interactions.”

As we work to develop policies, we need to advocate for tomorrow – disparity has been around for far too long without any solid solution in play. Together, combining our data and resources, we can end the lack of care and move the needle to equality.

Food: Jason Jakubowski

Food insecurity is not a singular issue. The interrelatedness of these various drivers for economic disparity became a theme in our conversation. According to Jason Jakubowski, President and CEO of

Foodshare, food insecurity is a branch on a tree with economic disparity as its trunk and deeply rooted historic, systemic issues digging into the ground. To provide just one solution would be to underestimate the number of rings in the tree or the weight of the soil holding it steady.

The causes of food insecurity range from generational inequity to an insufficiently funded social safety net that is not prepared to carry individuals who live paycheck to paycheck and are at risk of being pushed into food insecurity due to job loss, an unexpected medical bill or a global pandemic. The choice between eating and keeping the heat on in a New England winter should not be a choice that people must make. In our response to food insecurity, Jakubowski works with a network of over 200 partner pantries and meal programs to provide people with nutritious food. They also share resources provide additional access and help. There is an emphasis on the work to build comprehensive, long-term solutions to end hunger while providing immediate response to the needs in our community.

There will not be one solution to food insecurity. It will require equitable and progressive changes in all areas where there are disparities leading to food insecurity. It will require partnership, setting aside conflicting interests that win out at the expense of those most vulnerable and acknowledging that food insecurity is not a personal failing but a systemic issue that should be treated as such. We will need to listen first to those with this “life experience,” who understand the issue better than anyone else, and then use their input to create programs that work for people instead of the system. Prioritize the work and the people who are struggling.

Jason concluded that we need to “talk, collaborate, and design policy and action that consider the entire tree rather than just one of its branches.”

Solutions

The overarching problem, poverty, is rooted in years of economic and racial disparity which has existed without the dire attention needed for far too long. The goal of the lecture was to open up the conversation, bring awareness to the forefront, but also create actionable steps to solutions.

The conversation illuminated the need. The need to work together, not in silos. The need to address disparity and inequality within this decade with concrete plans. It also illuminated priorities, such as to provide access to equitable education, healthcare, food, nutrition, housing, capital and opportunity for our black and brown citizens.

The private, public, and non-profit sectors must work together to encourage political leaders to understand and commit to eliminating economic disparity within the next ten years.

Existing since the inception of our country, the need has never become more apparent than during the 2020 pandemic. Citizens rose up in protest crying for fair treatment and fair policies as the divide of the haves and have nots was exposed. Hourly workers without degrees were subject to loss of employment while those in certain sectors worked in less than favorable conditions without added compensation. Food insecurity and fear of eviction was at an all-times high while politicians were debating nonsensical solutions for endless months of stalemate.

Also, as Jason Jakubowski stated, “We need to work on the low hanging fruit first, provide emergency care and services immediately without interruption.” Then the various sectors need to work together

to bring all practical services together (housing, literacy, education, job training, access to healthcare, nutritional food, and entrepreneurial capital) all in an effort to reduce poverty.

Solutions which we can begin now:

1. Equalize educational opportunity for all people, at all levels
2. Expand curriculum to include life skills
3. Acknowledge people as people – people with the same basic needs for survival no matter their race, ethnicity, culture, nationality, etc.
4. Become a corporate citizen and invest in OUR communities, our time, talent, and treasure
5. Encourage Parity Commitments from corporate and business partners, and our employers
6. Intentionally bring diverse backgrounds and perspectives into the conversation
7. Form Equity Teams to focus on making a difference in minority owned businesses
8. Support non-profits, programs, and systems that are already in place and working

Solutions we can work towards with our local and state officials:

9. Allot the same amount of funds (per student) to all school districts regardless of zip code
10. Increase the minimum wage to \$15.00 per hour without inflating rent, utilities, and food for at least 2-years
11. Finance equal access to medical care. (Continuous DE&I training for all medical providers)
12. Fund to accelerate minority owned businesses
13. Improve access to higher education and secondary educational opportunities without debt
14. Create supply and entrepreneurial opportunities where people are suffering
15. Teach economics and wealth development tied to career and business opportunities

A Coalition to End Economic Disparity in Connecticut can be a working group of leaders from every corner of the state. The policies that prohibit or restrict economic growth should be eliminated. The barriers to equal access to education, housing, and nutritional food should be eliminated. There should be an adequate representation of people of color at the solution stage as we create programs that impact these populations. As we collectively learn to listen to the population, we will begin to also make appropriate policies and programs for the individuals we are trying to impact. Also, as we look at the collected data, we must also evaluate how, and which, programs actually work.

Education is imperative and we must begin earlier to teach young people how to earn and manage money. The earlier we teach the opportunity, growth, and empowerment that gaining wealth can bring, the better our chance for reducing poverty. A curriculum can be developed to provide this information however, we need to be intentional and deliberate in providing the education. Make money and financial literacy education mandatory. Reading, writing, math, and critical thinking skills are all required to understand, money, businesses building, and even the stock market.

We need to teach economics and wealth development tied to career and business opportunities also.

When black business owners can earn the same income as their white counterpart, we will know we are on the way to equality. When every citizen is encouraged to be “their best, healthiest self” we will know we are on the way to equality. When children are encouraged to follow their academic desires

without barriers of access and financial support, we will know we are on the way to equality. When housing is provided – safe, affordable, efficient housing – then we will know we are on our way to equality. When our communities prosper and food insecurity is a thing of the past, then we will know we are on our way to equality. Until then, we must encourage and empower each other to continue to move the needle.

In conclusion, this paper documents some of the suggestions and approaches of the participants, but its most powerful message is the conversation itself. The Charter Oak State College Foundation gathered community members to have a serious conversation about economic disparities and their solutions. The conversation began so well that the program was extended from one meeting to three. We were all struck by the enthusiasm, commitment, and positivity of the participants. Everyone was focused on solving the problem of economic disparity, and that focus made all the conversations optimistic. We look forward to your responses to this report and invitations to your conversations about economic disparity in Connecticut.

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The Charter Oak State College Foundation, Inc.

The Charter Oak State College Foundation, founded in 1977, is dedicated to supporting flexible and comprehensive degree completion opportunities and committed to the educational and career satisfaction for students of Charter Oak State College. The Foundation Board of Directors provides volunteer leadership for development and fundraising programs and stewardship of the Foundation's assets in order to assist deserving and underemployed adult students with college costs; award scholarships and grants; and encourage technological initiatives that enable the College to be a leader in higher education.

The Foundation is working towards expanding the effort to break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage for our black and brown community members by increasing financial support to higher education degree completion. A proven formula, degree completion positively impacts individuals and increases opportunities for career, business, and economic improvements. Thusly, positively impacting our communities. Join the Foundation in this effort by making a gift to the Foundation today!

Give to Life-Changing Degree Completion at <http://bit.ly/Give2CharterOak>. *The Foundation is exempt from tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.*

Commemorative Tee-Shirts:

Support Degree Completion and the Shea Lecture mission of bringing awareness, understanding, and actionable solutions to the discussion of Economic Disparity. This t-shirt, another collaboration, represents Charter Oak State College's effort to further raise awareness while supporting We Shine Apparel and Accessories, a local minority-owned business, a minority artist, and raising funds for the **COSC Foundation Scholarship program.**

Two designs to choose from, please visit: <http://bit.ly/SheaLecture-WeShine-BridgeTheGap-Tee> or <http://bit.ly/SheaLecture-WeShine-Tee>

View the Lecture Series:

Charter Oak State College Website: <https://www.charteroak.edu/news/2020-shea-lecture.php> or visit the West Hartford Chamber You Tube Channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCI64XTtSuL0TSydLoU4CLVA/videos>

Colorful Conversations: West Hartford Minority Business Network

Participate in the upcoming series called Colorful Conversations. An extension of the Shea Series, The West Hartford Chamber of Commerce and the Minority Business Network will gather local business owners, experts, and state leaders to keep the equity discussion moving forward.

For details visit: <https://www.whchamber.com/minority-business-network>

Resources:

- uniteus.com
- Healthypeople.gov
- <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-of-health#top>
- HIMSS Population and Public Health
- <https://www.himss.org/resources/social-determinants-health-breaking-down-barriers>

Charter Oak State College, Connecticut's only public fully online, provides the perfect platform as a virtual learning leader for over 45 years. The college was established to provide women (and men) an affordable path to degree completion, a generous credit transfer policy, credit for life experience, and workforce relevant degree programs.

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