



News Release

CCSU Establishes the John Lewis Institute for Social Justice

Award-winning NFL executive and CCSU alum, Scott Pioli, to serve as founding chair of Institute that will empower a new generation of leaders to better understand the roots of inequality and impact positive change

New Britain, Conn., (February 25, 2021) —Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) today announced it has established the John Lewis Institute for Social Justice to empower a new generation to follow in the footsteps of the civil rights leader in building a better and more just world. The Institute seeks to inspire students to not only recognize inequality, but to help eliminate injustice by fostering a deeper understanding of its roots. Through its mission, the Institute hopes to develop students who become social justice advocates and leaders inspired to pursue careers in public service.

“An important component of our mission is to prepare students to be thoughtful, responsible and successful citizens. As our society continues to struggle with the persistence of inequality, many of our students have proactively sought out ways to become more informed and involved in social justice initiatives,” said Dr. Zulma Toro, president of CCSU. “The founding of this Institute is yet another example of how we are creating innovative opportunities to help our students excel by providing them with learning experiences both in and out of the classroom.”

Scott Pioli '88, a longtime supporter of social justice initiatives, is the Institute's founding donor. He will also serve as founding chair to guide the direction, curriculum, experiences and outcomes for the Institute's student scholars. In addition to Pioli, the Institute will be led by Dr. Stacey Miller, the University's recently appointed Vice President for the Office of Equity and Inclusion, who will serve as executive director. Dr. Miller will be responsible for the oversight of the student cohort and all programming. Both Mr. Pioli and Dr. Miller will also identify additional advisory panel members.

“Throughout my career I have worked to champion equal rights for underserved and minority populations, so when President Toro approached me with this opportunity, I knew I wanted to be involved,” said Mr. Pioli, an NFL Network and CBS Sports analyst and five-time NFL executive of the year. “I am incredibly proud of CCSU for taking the initiative to launch this Institute, and I am honored to have the opportunity to partner with the University and its student scholars to continue working towards social justice.”

Social justice is a communal effort dedicated to creating and sustaining a fair and equal society in which each person and all groups are valued and affirmed. It encompasses efforts to end systemic violence, racism and all systems that devalue the dignity and humanity of any person.

Inspiring Students to Seek “Good Trouble”

Through the Institute, student scholars will explore social justice in deeper context by delving into topics including public service, civil rights, environmental racism, food insecurity, social justice, mass incarceration and under-represented populations. They will also create, lead and participate in social justice initiatives both on campus and in the surrounding communities.

“Throughout his life of service in pursuit of justice, Rep. Lewis encouraged young people to get into ‘good trouble, necessary trouble,’ and this Institute will encourage our students to carry on his legacy and fight for social justice,” said Dr. Miller. “Our hope is that this Institute will prepare a new group of leaders to fulfill his final request—that this generation becomes the one to help peace triumph over violence.”

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CCSU undergraduate students in any area of study can become scholars of the Institute for a term of two years. The institute will select 12 to 15 student scholars for its first cohort set to begin in the fall of 2021. Students can find additional information by visiting www.ccsu.edu/johnlewisinstitute.

CCSU will hold a **virtual launch event** for the Institute today, **Thursday, February 25, at 3 p.m.** featuring speakers including Mr. Pioli, President Toro, Dr. Miller and CCSU students and alumni. For more information or to attend, please visit www.ccsu.edu/jlilaunch.

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