



Testimony  
Senate Bill Number 916, "An Act Concerning Remediation"  
February 17, 2011

Good morning, Senator Bye, Representative Willis and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. For the record, I am James W. Schmotter, President of Western Connecticut State University (WCSU), and I am here to speak in support of proposed Senate Bill 916, which concerns postsecondary remedial education.

Since the 2004-2005 school year, Western Connecticut State University has partnered with Bethel and Danbury high schools on a project called "Building a Bridge to Improve Student Success." The partnership has helped thousands of high school seniors move successfully to college — and to succeed there.

The majority of students who graduate from Bridges and attend Western are able to skip remedial classes in mathematics and writing and move instead into credit-bearing classes. That means they will be able to earn their university degree more quickly, saving both money and time.

And just as significant, the two-year retention rate for Bridges students is 21 percent higher than for students from non-Bridges schools.

The Bridge Program starts with high school juniors, who take Western's placement exams in Writing and Mathematics to determine where they would place if they enrolled in college that semester. Then, during the summer, university and high school faculty plan curricular changes for high school seniors to help at-risk students become college-ready. Students are retested in the spring of their senior year to measure progress. At the same time, juniors are tested for the next cohort of students in the project.

The Bridges partnership between Western and Bethel and Danbury high schools has served as a model for the Connecticut State University System (CSUS), with our three sister universities now engaged in projects with their local high schools. These collaborations cross boundaries and match high school standards with college expectations, improve access, accountability, affordability and the quality of the students' education.

In other words, prepared students enter the university ready to take full advantage of the opportunities offered. Prior to the start of Bridges in 2005, 61% of students from Bethel and Danbury high schools required remedial writing and 62% required remedial math. These figures have dropped dramatically since then. In fall 2010 only 13.8% required remedial writing and those requiring remedial math dropped to 32.8%. Equally significant is the one year retention rate of Bridges students vs. others. Fall 2010 retention for the Fall 2009 cohort for Bridges students was 81.2% compared to 73.3% for non-Bridges students.

Recently, we have expanded the program in the following ways:

- In 2009, we added science to the Bridges curriculum and expanded our reach into the middle school grades.
- Also in 2009, we began offering a Young Writers Conference in early August. Last year forty-eight middle school and high school students attended the five-day program to hone their writing skills in a variety of genres, including fiction, poetry, journalism, memoir, songwriting, flash fiction, and the college admissions essay.
- In 2009 and 2010, nearly 100 students from the Exploration Academy at Rogers Park Middle School in Danbury visited Western for a half day of enrichment activities across the disciplines that culminated in a campus tour. Each team participated in two enrichment activities led by WCSU faculty and staff. In 2010, 90 Bethel Middle School students enjoyed a similar program.
- During the week of August 24-27, 138 sixth, seventh, and eighth graders from Bethel Middle School and Danbury's Rogers Park Middle School Exploration Academy attended the Bridge Program's first "Camp College" on Western's two campuses. Participants took classes led by Western professors in Math, Biology, Chemistry and Writing, ate in the university's cafeterias, and heard about college life from Western students. The middle school students studied cockroach grooming behaviors and triggered male Siamese fighting fish threat displays. In addition, they went on an "Excellent Bug Adventure" to learn about the ecology of insects and took a "Chemical Wizarding" class. All of these experiences were the fodder for writing classes where the students created poems, stories, and essays about nature. One of the highlights of the camp was a Rocketry Workshop led by Rick Varner, NASA Education Specialist, where students built paper rockets and launched them outdoors to see which models worked best. Camp College, designed to get children on the college track early, was deemed a huge success by the middle school participants, their administrators, and the Western students and professors who presented the program.
- Beginning in spring of 2010, eighth graders from Danbury's Rogers Park Middle School and Broadview Middle School along with Bethel Middle School students have participated in a semester-long Junior Meteorology Program. Working with Western meteorology students, the middle school students learn about weather forecasting and video production and are able to use Western's state-of-the-art weather center technology to produce and star in their own professional-looking weather broadcasts.
- This semester, students from Danbury High School and Bethel High School are working with Dr. Albert Owino, Director of WCSU's Weather Center, on hurricane research. Students will collect and analyze data about hurricane patterns and create web reports to share with weather centers.
- Each semester, students from Western's honors program tutor Danbury and Bethel middle school students in Math and English. The schools' administrators report that this program has helped their students raise their grades and gain confidence, while many of the Western honors students have decided to major in education as a result of their tutoring experience.

Funding for the Bridge Program has come from a combination of government and corporate sources. Western Connecticut State University has shared a significant piece of a state appropriation for Bridges during the past two years. To date, CSUS has received, through the Department of Higher Education, a total of \$553,788 for Bridges. Of this total, \$158,016 has not yet been distributed to the universities. Of the remaining amount, WCSU has received \$117,426, with another \$34,500 to be transferred this month,

for a total of \$151,926. The Department of Justice provided a \$100,000 grant to expand the program into Danbury and Bethel middle schools. Scholarship money to send underserved middle and high school students to the Young Writers Conference came from a TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) grant. In addition, the Praxair Corporation has generously donated \$120,000 in funds, while Pitney Bowes, Unilever, and United Technologies have each given significant gifts to help fund the program.

The Bridges initiative demonstrates how the need for postsecondary remediation can be significantly reduced through the cooperative efforts of high school and university administrators, teachers and faculty. Continuation and expansion of the Bridges model is an opportunity to increase both the graduation and retention rates of university students in Connecticut and reduce the cost of receiving a college education.

Thank you.

James W. Schmotter  
President  
Western Connecticut State University