

Testimony to the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

Re: HB 5030

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Senator Bye, Representative Willis, and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify about HB 5030, AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A GENERAL EDUCATION CORE OF COURSES. I cannot be present in person to testify due to my teaching commitments, but I submit this electronic testimony for your consideration.

After becoming aware of this bill, I contacted a colleague in the administration at CalState, which recently implemented the first phase of their Transfer Articulation Agreement, to gather information. I thought some of this information would helpful in guiding us in Connecticut.

- The perceived problem in California was that students were completing associate's degrees of 60 hours, and then being denied admittance to CalState. Students were ending up taking 70 to 80 credits at the community college system before getting enough credits to be admitted to the state universities.
- This year CalState and the CCCs instituted a "transfer associate's degree" following the model outlined by the Center for Community Colleges, which allows automatic transfer of students from community colleges. It was not voluntary; it was mandated by the state, and it took one to two years to develop and implement. It has not yet been completely implemented: the first five majors (the largest) just went on line. They are moving from the largest major to the smallest (as calculated by the largest major across all campuses). There is no data available on how well the students do, as the first cohort has just been admitted.
- When this process began, all CalState universities already shared a common Gen Ed, created in the 1960s when the Cal State system came into being. The 8 original colleges worked to agree on a the common core (it was difficult and took time) and each of the new universities adopted it, such that 23 universities have a common Gen ED of 68 units, of which about half are specific required courses and the other half electives. Therefore, the CalState universities did not have to standardize their curriculum while also aligning it with the community colleges.
- Although there is a common Gen Ed, there is also a general understanding that the universities come in various sizes and have different missions. So, majors are not identical across all schools; nor are major requirements the same, but they are moving to close gap between university major requirements and the CC curriculum.
- Since Cal State already had a common Gen Ed, the University faculty presented documentation to the CC faculty of their Gen Ed programs and majors for the CC faculties to use as a benchmark in revising their associate's degrees. The community college faculties had the last word about what their degrees would look like. The two Gen Ed programs are not identical, but they are closer than they were. The CalState Universities were not forced to adapt to the California Community Colleges' curricula. The change was the other way around.

- Representatives of the Cal State undergrad faculty now meet regularly with representatives of the community colleges' faculty to negotiate transfer curriculum and expectations. Quality of courses and students coming out of the community college system was a concern of university faculty.
- In regards to education majors, California's education certification process differs from those in Connecticut. There, all students for secondary education degree complete a 120 to 130 credit major in a discipline, the student graduates, and then the students returns for a one-year program from which s/he earns a teaching credential. This is not a master's degree, it is simply a fifth year leading to a teaching certificate. Students must be recommended for this program.
- Common numbering systems: California tried to institute common numbering system, with agreed upon common content (e.g. for Math 105), but it was impractical--the numbers quite rapidly went out of sync.
- Most Cal State majors had moved up to around 130 units on average, but in the last year or so, all disciplines but the sciences have moved back to about 120.
- Connecticut differs from California in numerous ways, aside from size. The CSU system does not have a common Gen Ed or identical majors—indeed standardizing either Gen Ed or majors would be impossible given the different sizes of departments and majors at the different CSU schools. To give just one example, in my field of history, CCSU has the largest department; SCSU's department is somewhat smaller; Eastern's department is less than half the size of Central's and Western's small department covers history and non-western cultures both.
- CCSU already has articulation agreements in place with other Connecticut colleges and universities, and according to the director of Transfer and Articulation agreements, CCSU is already the most "user friendly" of the CSU campuses to transfer students. (See our transfer page: https://webapps.ccsu.edu/CTAB/CCSU_TransCourses.aspx.) Moving to standardize curriculum across the four CSUs would potentially jeopardize this existing process for students, or at least fill it with confusion.

To summarize, I believe the deadline of July 1, 2012 is inappropriate for any implementation of a Transfer Articulation Agreement in Connecticut. It would take at least 1, but probably 2 years to begin to implement any program reform of such magnitude in our state. If the state is going to align curriculum across the four CSUs, the first step should be to survey the different CSU Gen Ed programs and common majors to see where the similarities and differences are, and then to allow the faculty to implement changes. The second step should be to articulate the university and community college systems. Even then, however, the impact would not be complete and total: provisions will have to be made for students who are already in the system. Some will be grandfathered into the old way of doing things while others them will prefer to remain with the old system.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on this important matter.

Best,

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