

Testimony for Public Hearing on H.B. No.5030  
AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A GENERAL EDUCATION CORE OF  
COURSES TO ALLOW FOR THE SEAMLESS TRANSFER FROM THE REGIONAL  
COMMUNITY-TECHNICAL COLLEGE SYSTEM TO THE CONNECTICUT STATE  
UNIVERSITY SYSTEM AND THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT.

Good afternoon, Senator Bye, Representative Willis, and members of the committee. Thank you for this time to comment on H.B. No.5030.

My name is Mike Shea. I am President of the AAUP chapter at Southern Connecticut State University and chair of the English Department; I have taught at Southern since 1985, and as both instructor and chair I have encountered numerous transfer students either taking our general education English courses or asking for waivers or transfer credits for them. I therefore have considerable experience with transfer students moving to Southern from various institutions. I am also the former chair of the University-Wide Impact Committee (UWIC), a subcommittee of Southern's University Curriculum Forum (UCF); UCF is the university's curriculum body that approves all undergraduate courses, and UWIC is the main arbitrator of the university-wide undergraduate curriculum on our campus, most notably general education.

I think you will find that Southern's faculty supports the "seamless transfer" for students proposed in H.B. No. 5030. I just want to caution you that, unless it is carefully crafted, this bill could end up hurting students more than it helps them.

How can that be? Well, let me give you just one example of what is likely to happen under a hastily composed bill.

By way of background, I have to tell you that a large number of Southern's upper-division courses, in all disciplines, are reading- and writing-intensive; in fact, to graduate from Southern, students must take at least three of these reading- and writing-intensive courses (we call them W-courses), usually one or two of them in the student's major area of study. We have this graduation requirement (and have had it for years—since 1981) because, as a university, we are committed to the national model for learning known as Writing Across the Curriculum (with the unfortunate acronym WAC). We know from national longitudinal studies that students read and write better if their university has a WAC program. So we created a WAC program—for the benefit of our students' education.

By now you're probably thinking, "That's interesting, but so what?" Well, here's the rub. Southern's general education requirement for first-year composition is ENG 112, entitled "Writing Academic Arguments," designed to help students read and write academic arguments in a variety of disciplines. We constructed this course as our first-year writing requirement because it prepares students for their upper-division W-courses in the best way we can. Yet many of our new sister institutions in the nascent Connecticut higher ed system have other writing courses as their general education requirement. A common one is entitled "Composition and Literature." For years Southern hasn't let this course transfer in as our writing requirement because it does not adequately prepare our students for the upper-division W-courses they will need to take. Instead of focusing on reading and writing academic arguments from a variety of disciplines, this course focuses on reading and writing about

literature. "Composition and Literature" is neither fish nor fowl—it doesn't teach reading and writing academic arguments well, and it gives short shrift to literature. Students come away with neither a full introduction to literature nor extensive experience reading and writing academic arguments.

As we all know, if a student isn't at skill-level for an upper-division course, either the student fails the course or the instructor lowers her standards for that student. Neither is a desirable outcome for high quality education.

A bill like this, however, could require us to accept whatever first-year writing course the transfer student has taken at our sister institutions. This arrangement might sound good to students and their parents, but it will help them only in the short run. Indeed, it might even sound good to us at Southern—it would be easier for us; it would be cheaper for us; but it would be detrimental to our students, to their learning and to their education. .

So here's one problem with this bill. It assumes that all university introductory courses in any given discipline—English, math, history, world languages, etc.—are essentially the same and are therefore interchangeable; that is not necessarily true, because the faculty design some introductory courses for the upper-division curriculum at their institution.

In the interests of time, I have given but one example to illustrate that the bill assumes that a first-year composition course at one institution cannot be very different from a first-year composition course at another institution, and therefore that ANY first-year composition course can fulfill the introductory writing requirement at all institutions. But we have just seen how these courses can very easily be quite different, and serve quite different ends. And that imbalance is also true in disciplines other than mine.

I'll let professors in those other disciplines address that issue, except to say that we also have a first-year experience course, INQ 101, entitled "Introduction to Critical Inquiry," required for all freshmen. For reasons too complex to explain in 3-minute testimony, if we accept transfers who haven't had this course and can't be required to take it, they will be at a disadvantage in Southern's student population.

Regarding "seamless transfer," faculty are not dragging our feet, despite what you may have been told. We are simply trying to provide the best education we can for our students—for your constituents. And each institution is doing so in the way that works best for their students. In trying to create 30-some credits of interchangeability, you might end up helping students transfer more quickly and easily while inadvertently setting them up for failure to graduate.

Thank you again for your efforts on behalf of all our current and future students—I know you have their best interests at heart. Please contact me if you want more information on ways to help students achieve "seamless transfer" across all state higher ed institutions and still receive a high-quality education in a timely manner at a bargain price.

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