

Testimony to the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

Re: HB 5030 [February 2012]

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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.

My name is Robert Wolff. I am currently Professor of History at Central Connecticut State University, where I have taught since 1997. I am also a member of the American Association of University Professors. I have served as both department chair and assistant to the dean. Since October 2010, I have also served on a Faculty Senate Ad Hoc Committee on General Education, tasked with proposing a revised general education program.

HB 5030 supports the laudable goal of facilitating the transfer of students from Connecticut's Community-Technical Colleges to UCONN and the four Connecticut State Universities. To do so it proposes a "common core" model of general education that would be shared across the schools, guaranteeing that students who complete a "transfer program" at the community colleges will be credited by the receiving institution with thirty credits toward general education.

HB 5030, however, can be read in different ways. If it guarantees transfer students thirty credits *eligible* for general education at a four-year school, I suspect it will have but a minimal effect on transfer students. In my experience as an academic advisor, students from the community colleges often bring substantial numbers of credits that already meet general education requirements at CCSU. Those credits, however, are not always *applicable* to the major programs they eventually select. Let me briefly explain.

We tend to think of general education and academic majors as separate programs but they are intertwined because numerous majors (especially in the STEM fields and teacher education) have related requirements that often overlap with general education. Careful advising in the community colleges as well as program-by-program articulation agreements with the four-year schools are the key to the "seamless transfer" that HB 5030 envisions. Mandating that the receiving schools *apply* thirty transfer credits to general education will not guarantee "seamless transfer" without careful program articulation, because students may still face related program requirements that lengthen their time to completion. Program by program articulation is the key, not a common core.

The language employed in discussions of a common core suggests a disconnect between external perspectives on general education and those of front-line teaching faculty. As framed in HB 5030 and in the Connecticut higher education regulations (see <http://www.ctdhe.org/regs/RegsAcad.htm>), general education consists of "core courses." Instead of asking what courses students should take, however, the faculty at CCSU and elsewhere now ask a more daring question: *what should students learn?* Instead of "what math class should students take," we

should ask, "what mathematical skills will best serve them in daily life?" Instead of, "should they take a lab class," we should ask "what do they need to understand about the nature of scientific inquiry?" Instead of requiring a course in history or politics, we should ask, "what can we do to make sure that students become active, productive citizens?"

I urge this Committee to focus upon articulation rather than a common core. Do not stifle the creativity and individuality that lies at the heart of general education programs in the four-year schools. Let the four-year schools maintain their own unique identities provided they can demonstrate clear pathways for transfer students. Let them explore the multitude of possibilities that exist for general education requirements, unencumbered by a least-common-denominator model of general education that a common core necessitates. In short, let the marketplace of free ideas prevail. The common core model of general education as proposed in HB 5030 is too simple, too superficial, to meet the needs of Connecticut students in the 21st century.

My sincere thanks to the Committee for listening to my thoughts on this important issue.