

## **Testimony to the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee**

**Re: SB40**

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Senator Bye, Representative Willis, and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify about SB 40, AN ACT CONCERNING OPEN ACCESS TO COLLEGE LEVEL COURSES.

I assume that this act was proposed to lower the cost of higher education for students in Connecticut, and in the belief that it may help students move more easily towards graduation. I believe the Act will do neither of these. In fact, it will do the opposite.

CSU institutions are institutions of access. This means that many of our students have underdeveloped academic skills. We can see this in the fact that more than 60% of students entering the CSU system require at least one developmental or remedial course. These needs are not determined randomly or arbitrarily but through placements exams given to students either before or shortly after arriving on campus. Once a deficit is determined, the universities then require the student to take a developmental or remedial course in order to address the skill deficit.

The act currently proposed would allow students to enter courses without first addressing these skill deficits. Thus, a student at Southern would be allowed to enter MAT 107, our introductory statistics class, even though the student does not have the college algebra or other arithmetic skills needed for the class. The result would be the student failing the class. The same thing could occur with a student being allowed to enter the Freshman Composition class without first addressing a writing skill deficit. Again, failure is likely to result. No matter how much a course is recommended, if a student is not required to take it, many will choose to ignore the recommendation and try their chances at an introductory course that the student is ill prepared to complete or pass. These early failures for the student are likely to lead some students to leave the university. Even those who do not leave the university will now need to retake the failed classes in order to graduate. Most likely this will mean the student will have to pay more for her education than if he had to take a required remedial class before attempting the introductory class. At the same time, the Fs will never leave the student's transcript, thus impacting his employability when she leaves the university.

Perhaps there is a belief that a student with deficient skills can be given enough help in an introductory class to overcome these deficits. This is unlikely. For instance, introductory math courses have between 25 and 30 students at Southern. With classes this large, it is very difficult for an instructor to address a student's skill deficiencies. Moreover, asking an instructor to do this actually provides a disservice to the other students in the class, since they will receive less time and attention from the instructor to learn the course content. Finally, we do not want an introductory class turning into a developmental one. This would result in students leaving a math or composition class without obtaining the skills the classes were designed to impart

making the student less prepared for her field of study and less competitive in the work force upon graduation (if he was able to graduate).

Remedial and developmental courses are not designed to harm students. They are designed to help them succeed. If we fail to require that students address skill deficits before moving into the regular curriculum we will not be helping them towards a degree, but instead helping to insure they fail and perhaps never obtain a degree.