

HEDTestimony

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Sent: Thursday, February 16, 2012 1:46 PM

To: HEDTestimony

Subject: Comments on Re. SB 40 -- please add to the record

To the Committee,

I am astonished and dismayed at the proposals offered in the text of SB 40: An Act Concerning Open Access to College Level Courses. I quote:

Section 1. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2012*) (a) Any student enrolled at a public institution of higher education may take an entry level course in a college level program offered by such institution. Such institution may recommend a student for remediation, but shall not require students to take remedial courses or enroll in a precollege remedial program.

(b) Public institutions of higher education shall offer remedial support in the classroom to students who demonstrate shortcomings in any entry level courses in a college level program.

This proposal is almost unbelievable in its idealism and naiveté. Allowing -- in fact encouraging -- unprepared students to bypass a comprehensive remedial program or developmental class and simply enroll into college-level courses is a dereliction of your duty as stewards of higher education. Such enrollments pretty much guarantee failure for the individual student and disruption of the class for the other, adequately prepared, students. It imagines that serious deficits in skills and attitude can be wished away, and it runs counter to every bit of hard-won intelligence we have gained about how to deal with the gap between high school work and college-level work. It contains the arrogant assumption that college courses are so empty that an instructor will have time, curriculum space, and energy to offer "remedial support in the classroom" to those who walk in the door unable to meet the standards of the class as offered.

Aware of the rising cost of remediation for college-students, we here at Northwestern Connecticut Community College have re-configured our developmental/remedial courses to focus intensively and coherently on the reading/writing skill matrix and on development of quantitative skills. As a result of our more coherent, focused, and intensive curriculum, we have shaved at least a full semester off the time a typical remedial student spends in non-college level courses. But this gain has come exactly because we have been able to focus specifically, with a homogenous student group, on particular deficits in a dedicated class. To imagine that we could take these unprepared students and simply drop them into a college-level course (Biology, History of Western Civilization, Statistics) and expect them to "make up" their deficits is nothing more than wishful thinking.

This bill, while it might masquerade as being student- and budget-friendly, will actually harm students as they experience successive and self-confirming failures. It will cost colleges more, as higher percentages of students withdraw or drop out. And, it will do serious damage to the integrity and stature of our institutions. As one of my colleagues here at Northwestern said: "If SB40 goes into effect, 'The Zoo' (a derogatory term from the 1970's) will, after all, be an appropriate name for our institution and its sister schools -- and we will take a huge step backwards."

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I urge you to drop consideration of this legislation immediately and look more carefully into the ways these students may be best served within the realities of our current political and budgetary climate.

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