

Testimony of the University of Phoenix
on H.B. No. 5029 AN ACT CONCERNING COLLEGE READINESS ASSESSMENTS.
February 16, 2012

The Honorable Beth Bye
The Honorable Roberta Willis
The Honorable Toni Boucher
The Honorable Tim LeGeyt

Honorable members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

I apologize that circumstances have prevented us from testifying today, but thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on the importance of college readiness.

Prospective students seeking access to higher education are less prepared than in the past and require greater support. High school dropout rates are now approximately 55% in many major cities like New York and Los Angeles. Even more concerning, many students who do graduate cannot perform at the twelfth grade level in reading or math. College freshmen whose elementary and secondary education has left them lacking in basic skills—about a third—have to catch up through college remedial classes that take time from major courses. Ill-prepared for the rigors of higher education, they waste time, money and opportunities. Failure to catch up can leave students discouraged enough to drop out. And that doesn't bode well in a society where a college degree is more important than ever.

Lately we have seen colleges and K-12 schools are working together to help students succeed. One example, the American Diploma Project, was created in 2001 to help young people graduate from high school and get a diploma that signifies they're ready for credit-bearing courses. Universities are starting to revamp their remedial courses by making them more relevant to student's lives and adaptable to their skill level.

At the University of Phoenix, we have been working with non-traditional students for decades. We have pioneered programs and tools to assist our students, such as our academic social network to connect students and professors at any time, electronic simulations to apply strategies as in real life, and centers for math and writing excellence where students can get real time help on math and writing projects. Recently, we have gone beyond just remedial courses and learning tools by offering a free orientation workshop.

Here in Connecticut, we have been providing classroom courses since 2005 with over 3,000 alumni in the state, many of whom either took classes at our ground campus in Norwalk or used the education tools we provide at the campus to support their online education, from tutoring and mentorships to career advancement and resume workshops. Our students are 70% female, 60% over the age of 30, and at least 25% minority reporting. The 273 staff and faculty that support our students are 55% female and over 40% minority reporting.

University of Phoenix was founded on the principle of innovating higher education for working learners. We are a pioneer in the connected, 360-degree educational experience and developed an up to date, relevant curriculum to meet the challenges of today's world. We do all that we can to make our education relevant to our students. Our faculty give an insider's view of the course subject because of their direct working experience in the fields that they teach. And our curriculum experts reach out to leaders in nursing, education, business, technology and other fields for their assistance in developing courses that accurately reflect today's professional environments.

Before our students start courses on their path to a new, or advanced, career, we have developed a tool for their use. University Orientation is a three-week, non-credit-bearing, free orientation workshop required of prospective students who have had less than one year of college experience. We designed the workshop to help students understand fully the commitment necessary to complete a college degree while meeting family and professional obligations. The program emphasizes the need for time management, computer skills, and prepares students for what they can expect in their coursework — whether in our online classrooms or at our on-the-ground facilities.

University Orientation gives prospective students, who enroll with less than 24 credits, critical insights into the realities of undertaking a university degree program. Students are given hands-on experience with the college classroom and the post-secondary academic environment; the time and skills required to succeed at University of Phoenix; and outlines the tools and resources available to all University of Phoenix students-- including an online library, writing center, and dozens of other academic workshops. Every student at University of Phoenix has a graduation team--made up of academic, financial aid, and enrollment advisors--along with instructors who work in the fields in which they teach, and IT staff available around the clock. In the Orientation workshop, instructors counsel prospective students on how to maximize the University's resources available to them--including graduation teams--to help ensure success. University Orientation also emphasizes the facts behind paying for college and what students should expect if they choose to apply for financial aid. University of Phoenix created the Orientation workshop to better prepare students to successfully complete their degree programs. Students with fewer than 24 credit hours of college experience (roughly one year of college) benefit from a hands-on program that accurately represents the academic format of a University of Phoenix classroom experience, and the expectations and requirements of students in their new learning environment. After completing the workshop, roughly one in five prospective students elect not to pursue their desired degree program—solely because of what they learned during the three-week course and weighing what they learned against their professional and family obligations. Of those students who do enroll after completion, their retention rates over the first few courses continue to be higher than average.

Only certified faculty members are eligible to teach the workshops and are hand-picked by our Director of Academic Affairs from our larger faculty pool. After Norwalk campus classes, the Orientation faculty member will be available for two hours after each workshop to assist students, as needed. Our practitioner faculty are each required to successfully complete a 16-hour, four week orientation, assessment and mentorship prior to teaching their first class. All of our instructors are seasoned professionals with years of experience working in their respective fields and have earned either a master's or a doctoral degree. Our professional faculty directly reflect on our students, as University of Phoenix students enter with lower average assessment scores than the national average but substantially close that gap by their senior year, meaning they demonstrate a greater rate of learning compared to national averages.

University of Phoenix is built on the belief that education is one of the primary factors that enables individuals to improve their lives. Each year, University of Phoenix Foundation helps organizations improve the lives of individuals and families by creating hope, discovery, dialogue, learning and educational opportunities in a variety of communities. We are proud to support many education focused groups, from *Everybody Wins!* helping children read, to *Roadtrip Nation* reaching into high school

education to help at-risk students in disadvantaged communities gain access and exposure to life pathways that they may have otherwise not known existed.

University of Phoenix is constantly innovating to help students balance education and life in a rapidly changing world. Through flexible schedules, challenging courses and interactive learning, students achieve personal and career aspirations without putting their lives on hold. University of Phoenix serves a diverse student population, offering associate, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degree programs from campuses and learning centers across the U.S. as well as online throughout the world.

Thank you again for a chance to serve as a reference for the committee.

If you have any questions, please contact us:

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Links for further information:

Apollo Group 2011 Academic Annual Report

http://cdn.assets-phoenix.net/content/dam/altcloud/doc/about_uopx/academic-annual-report-2011.pdf

Higher Education at a Crossroads

[http://www.apollogrp.edu/Investor/Reports/Higher Education at a Crossroads FINALv2\[1\].pdf](http://www.apollogrp.edu/Investor/Reports/Higher_Education_at_a_Crossroads_FINALv2[1].pdf)