

March 3, 2021

To the members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee in response to HB6402:

My name is Catherine Babbitt and I am an Associate Professor of English in the First Year Studies Department at Gateway Community College. I am also the General Studies Coordinator and general advisor. I am also a graduate of Gateway.

Gateway's First Years Studies Department houses development math, developmental English, and first-year experience courses. We also have an in-office First Year Student Success Coordinator. Our students are academically and, frequently, socially unprepared for college, so we are not only instructors but many times mentors, social workers, shoulders to cry on, and friends. My department does not exist in the New College organizational chart.

I assume it is because the developmental education courses will be eliminated. Without developmental students, there is obviously no need for our department. The problem is that there is still a dire need for developmental courses. Eliminating those and placing students into a one-size-fits-all English 101 is not the answer. It might appear that students will save money and time, but I can tell you firsthand that is not the case. First, many lower-level students are already intimidated by the academic arena. If they are lumped in with higher-level students, they will be even more intimidated and feel even more "less than". That's strike one. If they overcome that insecurity, then the next obstacle is the workload. English 101 is a prerequisite for many of the major program courses such as BIO105, SOC111, etc. Developmental students cannot be afforded the time they need to learn punctuation, grammar, spelling, and even basic computer skills at times. A student can handle only so many "please revise for a higher grade" comments before feeling defeated. That's strike two. There are financial aid repercussions if a student repeats a course for a third time. Even so, how many students will come back after failing a course twice. Without a refresher course, they will have terrible trouble passing the course. And please understand that when I say failing, it refers to a C- or lower. I have never posted an F for students who did the best they could considering academics, employment, and family life. But that's strike three. Out they go - never to return when, in fact, if they had a semester of developmental courses, they would have had a much better chance to pass English 101. So, we might be able to tally their enrollment and collect their tuition for two, maybe three semesters yet neither party will have anything to show for it.

I suppose that we could "water it down", but have the consequences been considered? We would be doing a disservice to ALL our students, a disservice to the instructors, a disservice to the college degree, and ultimately a disservice to ALL Connecticut community colleges.

Here are a few successes because of developmental education:

- 23-year-old female who is beginning Johnson and Wales this semester sent me an email thanking me for my dedication and letter of recommendation. I had this student for two semesters.
- 22-year-old who graduated high school through a special program but placed into our English bootcamp. On the first day, she began to cry and said, "I can't do this". I asked her to give me an hour, and then if she really wanted to leave, I wouldn't stop her. I had this student for 3 semesters as she has learning difficulties, and though it took her a bit longer to reach ENG101,

she is set to graduate with her Early Childhood Certificate in May. She will probably not go on to earn a Bachelors, but college has been an absolute success in her eyes as well as mine. I am certain that she would not have made it through English101 and that she would not have returned for a second attempt.

Because I wear a few hats, I must be a bit long-winded, so I apologize. We have only spoken about academics, and that's only have of our students' challenges. Many times students will "follow" an instructor from a developmental course to their ENG101, so instructors have the same students for at least two semesters. And this is sometimes THE most important part – students forge relationships with us; they trust us. Some have never had someone they could fully trust. They come back to the college because they belong here – there is an entire community routing for them. Again, I am giving firsthand experience – students who have taken only English101 with me hardly ever come to see me. But students who have class with me more than once reach out even after they graduate. And, yes, I can offer proof. Before then, they come for class advising, career advice, business advice, family advice, etc. Sometimes it's even a bit awkward with all that they tell me. But I would never turn them away.

By eliminating developmental education, my tools are being taken away. I will not be able to serve our students in the way they need. And we will lose them. Please be sure that any data presented is truly representative of OUR students and that our students are viewed as people, NOT numbers. It's not going to matter if we jampack an English101 classroom in the Fall if they don't come back in the Spring.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Catherine Babbitt
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