Implementing a Plan to Decrease the Number of First-year Students Requiring Remedial Courses in Math and English at CCSU

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2000) indicate that more than 30% of entering first-year college students in the United States are required to take at least one remedial course. That number has been significantly higher at Central Connecticut State University. From 2003 to 2005, between 51% and 55% of entering students were required to take a remedial course in either math, English, or both; for each of the past two years, 2006 and 2007, that number dropped to 43% of entering first-year students—an appreciable decline but still well above the national average. For each of the past five years, these percentages translate into a headcount ranging from 550 to 750 first-year students who have been required to take at least one remedial course.

Although over 90% of students who take the remedial English 099 course satisfactorily complete it, nearly a third of students who take the remedial math 099 course do not satisfactorily complete it the first time they take it and are required to repeat the course. Moreover, the number of students who are required to take a remedial math course is significantly greater than the number of students who are required to take a remedial English course (between 450 and 650 first-year students have taken a remedial math course in each of the past five years versus 125-165 remedial English students).

A Board of Trustees resolution on Proficiency (or remedial) courses was passed in July 2003 requiring all undergraduate matriculated students attending CSU campuses to meet proficiency requirements in Mathematics 99 and English 99 before completing 24 credits. Although only a very small number of students have failed to meet this requirement in the past five years, over 50 students per year have had to retake the remedial math course a second time and approximately 10 students per year must take it a third time.

CCSU’s commitment to remedial education presents at least two significant problems. The first is that it requires a significant allocation of resources. Since fall 2003, CCSU has offered 289 sections of remedial math courses and 78 sections of remedial English courses. As most remedial courses are taught by part-time faculty, we conservatively estimate that, from fall 2003 to spring 2008, paying the faculty to teach these courses has cost CCSU no less that $1.5 million over the past five years—plus the adverse impact of staffing these courses on the university’s ratio of part-time to full-time faculty. The second problem is that significantly fewer students who take remedial courses graduate within six years than students who do not take remedial courses (remedial courses do not count as credits toward graduation); students who do not successfully complete a remedial course the first time they take it graduate at about half the rate as students who do not take remedial courses.

To address the problem of remedial education, CCSU proposes to implement a program modeled on the successful “Bridges” program instituted at Western Connecticut State
University. The aim of the program is to reduce the number of high school students who need remediation upon entering college. By reducing the need for remediation, we hope to increase student retention and to increase the number of students who successfully complete a college education.

The plan is based on cultivating a collaborative relationship with school districts from which CCSU consistently enrolls a cohort of graduates. Aimed at increasing communication among teachers of English and math at the schools and university, these collaborations will help to clarify college expectations in both math and English for school teachers and students and define the academic experiences necessary for high school students to graduate with college-level proficiencies.

CCSU proposes initially to enter into such a collaborative relationship with two local school districts: New Britain (NB) and Bristol. Over the past five years, approximately 50 graduates from each of these schools have enrolled annually at CCSU. Of those students, the percentage requiring remediation from New Britain has more than doubled from 28% in 2003 to 63% in 2007, whereas the percentage of students requiring remediation from Bristol has decreased from 69% in 2003 to 35% in 2007.

By the third year of the project, CCSU proposes to add a third school district: West Hartford. Over the past five years, an average of 31 students from West Hartford have enrolled annually at CCSU. The percentage of West Hartford students requiring remediation at CCSU has increased from 28% in 2003 to 63% in 2007.

Entering into such a partnership with the New Britain School District will build on a solid foundation of collaboration between teachers at CCSU and in the New Britain schools. Because entering students have been less well prepared for college-level math, our interactions have especially targeted math teachers, but we are presently exploring opportunities for English faculty from CCSU and the schools to collaborate as well. Examples of ongoing collaborations include

- Meetings between our EOP coordinator and math department chairs at NB high school concerning improvements in the mathematics curriculum for students in the ConnCAP college preparatory program.
- Placing tutors in field experiences at NB high school, with our new one-credit course, MATH 311.
- A CCSU math teacher is developing a proposal to bring students from NB high school to campus to be taught enrichment lessons by students in her math methods course. This program is modeled on one that has been successful at Hofstra University on Long Island.
- A CCSU math teacher collaborated with the NB district mathematics supervisor on a Teacher Quality Partnership grant proposal for the middle school.
• CCSU faculty from math and reading serve as consultants for a new Global Collegiate Academy for Grades 6-8, which is housed in CCSU’s ITBD facility in downtown New Britain.
• Building off of the Global Collegiate Academy initiative, the CCSU School of Education and Professional Studies convened a group composed on New Britain curriculum leaders as well as CCSU faculty to submit a Teacher Quality Partnership grant that will provide New Britain teachers with professional development in Math, Reading, Literacy and Science.
• The chair of the CCSU math department has scheduled a meeting with the two NB math department chairs to examine ways to extend our partnership with them.

Although our relationship with the Bristol School District is not as fully developed as the one with NB, President Miller and Provost Lovitt met in fall 2007 with V. Everett Lyons, Principal of Bristol Eastern High School, to discuss plans to collaborate in providing collegiate experiences for Bristol students. Additionally, Dean Mitchell Sakofs met in January 2008 with Bristol’s Superintendent of Schools to discuss the feasibility of establishing a formal relationship with CCSU to address college readiness for their students.

Faculty members in our math and English departments will cultivate relationships with math and English teachers in West Hartford over the next two years in preparation for bringing them into the project in 2010.

To build on these existing relationships for the specific purpose of reducing the need for remedial education, we propose to undertake the following initiatives:

1. Spring 2008, CCSU will administer placement testing of juniors at New Britain and Bristol high schools in math. We plan to administer the Accuplacer test.
2. Summer 2008, we will organize a retreat for math teachers from CCSU and the two high schools to discuss specific curricular implications of the placement test results and to identify possible curricular and pedagogical changes
3. Spring 2009, CCSU proposes to administer placement testing of juniors and seniors at both high schools in math and of juniors in English. We plan to administer the Accuplacer tests in both subjects. Following the analysis of the test results, we will convene dinner meetings with college and high school faculty in both subjects to review the results.
4. Summer 2009, hold a second retreat for math and English teachers to review results and assess impact of any curricular changes
5. Fall 2009, CCSU prepares and submits to the Board of Trustees for the Connecticut State University system a progress report for the Bridges program
6. Spring 2010, administer the Accuplacer tests to juniors at West Hartford and juniors and seniors at the other two high schools, with plans to hold dinner meetings to review results.
We estimate that implementing the CCSU Bridges Program will require a budget for the 2008-09 fiscal year approximately $85,000. This budget will include:

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<th>Item</th>
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<tr>
<td>Stipends for participating high school teachers</td>
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<td>Stipends for participating CCSU faculty</td>
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