

**FOR PRESIDENT DREW MATONAK**

**DRAFT Testimony for New NY Education Reform Commission Hearing Tuesday, July 10, 2012**

**3-4 minutes of oral testimony ONLY, questions to follow from commissioners**

**PANEL 3: Student Achievement and Family Engagement; Drew will be speaking on student preparedness and college readiness**

Good afternoon, it is a privilege to be here today. I am extremely excited to see this commission getting down to business and hearing all sides of the issues. I know that with Governor Cuomo's commitment to improving education, we are well on our way to seeing great changes in New York.

I am Drew Matonak, President at Hudson Valley Community College in Troy, New York. Hudson Valley serves approximately 13,500 students and offers more than 70 degree and certificate programs. We are of course, part of the larger SUNY system, which includes 30 community colleges all across New York State.

As many of you know, community colleges play a critical role in educating New York's future workforce. Because all of our community colleges embrace the concept of open admissions, we must provide remedial education and support services to those not prepared to do college-level work. Therefore it is by necessity that we are engaged in the conversation around education reform and appreciate the opportunity to work cooperatively toward the solutions for our future.

Student preparedness and college readiness are issues that we at the community college level deal with everyday.

**60% of traditional college students** — those transitioning directly from high school — **are not college ready**...meaning they require remediation in at least one content area to make up for poor or inadequate preparation at the primary and secondary level.

And the need for remediation is trending upward: Over the 8-year period between 1999-2006, **the need for remediation at SUNY community colleges rose by over 8%.**

These remedial courses are very expensive — **\$70 million in state aid is spent across SUNY each year.**

Additionally, **approximately 20% of financial aid awarded to students is used to cover tuition costs for remedial courses.** This equates to nearly **\$93 million carried by students** – of which **\$39 million comes from loans** that must be repaid, regardless of whether they are successful or not.

Research also tells us that students who need remediation in more than one content area are significantly less likely to persist and complete their education. **Fewer than 10% of students who start two levels below college in Math ultimately pass the college level math course or persist to graduation.**

That doesn't mean we are without hope, but we **are** facing a large population of students who are coming to us unprepared for college-level work, spending money to pay for remedial courses, not completing their degrees or becoming working graduates, and carrying student loan burdens.

At Hudson Valley Community College, we are addressing the need for remediation in a few creative ways, and we are working hard to reduce its related operating costs and student debt as well.

First, consider these statistics:

Remediation and academic support costs Hudson Valley approximately \$2.3 million annually. Based on their academic background, 4,000 potential students have historically come to our Testing Office to take the college academic placement test. Of those students, 3,800 place "weak" in one or more subjects (reading, writing, or math). As a result, 1,131 students are enrolled in remedial coursework.

10% of our students place academically weak in **all three** subject areas. For these students, we **mandate** enrollment in one developmental class and often **recommend** other remedial courses or learning assistance during the academic advisement process.

There is a big difference between mandating and recommending remedial education. But, because we consider data collected from multiple measures when we advise and place our students, we are able to reduce the number of students in remediation and the cost incurred by the college and by the student too.

We're also in the pilot phase of a new initiative to waive the placement test for students based on their high school average rather than ACT or SAT scores and early college coursework. So, this year we'll see our number of tested students cut in half, from approximately 4,000 to 2,000.

Our research showed us that two-thirds of our students with an 80 or above high school average received a GPA of 2.0 or higher during their first semester. This data is consistent with recent national studies that show a student's high school average is a more reliable indicator of college readiness than placement testing scores alone.

Again, less students in remediation means lower cost for the college and our students.

Obviously the support we offer our students once they are here is critical and one reason we have been able to reduce the number of students in remediation. Our outstanding Learning Assistance Center staffed by full- and part-time education specialists, tutors and peer tutors provides drop-in academic support to all students and one-on-one or small-group instruction in math, learning strategies and other content areas.

The Learning Centers, along with our Collegiate Academic Support Program for traditionally underserved students, is housed in our Marvin Library Learning Commons where, this fall, we'll complete extensive renovations to update and centralize our students' academic support services in one integrated facility.

Also this fall, the college is launching the new Center for Academic Engagement where professionals at the center will identify and intervene with students at-risk of failing or dropping out, and provide a range of support services, from personal counseling to tutoring.

There's another tactic that reduces remediation as well. Our TEC-SMART facility in Malta hosts the innovative Clean Technologies and Sustainable Industries Early College High School in partnership with Ballston Spa Central School District. Here, 11th and 12th graders are enrolled in both high school and college. They earn their high school diploma and up to 20 hours of college-level credit in specific green, clean, and high technology fields.

The program was launched last fall with 25 students from Ballston Spa and Saratoga Springs high schools. Approximately 100 students from more than a dozen school districts will take part in the forward-thinking program this fall.

Why am I telling you about this? Because by placing students in a technical or applied/hands-on programs while in high school, they are more likely to learn and retain the necessary academic subject area skills needed for college technical programs, particularly in STEM related fields. Again, this also reduces the need for remediation once in college.

Finally, one more strategy: Hudson Valley is a part of the Tech Valley Career Pathways Consortium which provides placement testing to juniors in eight Capital Region high schools in order to determine college readiness. The end goal is to offer a college preparation course in high school to students who test weak. Hudson Valley professors worked with high school faculty to create the curriculum in the high school college prep course based on our existing college developmental course so students can be identified and receive the help they need earlier.

Community colleges are situated at a critical academic transition point along the pathway from cradle to career, and SUNY is committed to increasing access and completion by reducing the need for, and cost of, remediation.

SUNY and CUNY have been tasked by Governor Cuomo and the Legislature to work together with our k-12 partners to study and issue recommendations on the problem of remediation. This report is due November 1 of this year, and we hope this information will inform major policy decisions.

- There are short-term actions we can work together to take now:
  - Implementation of a college readiness exam by the end of 10<sup>th</sup> grade:
    - When students in high school graduate without knowledge of their readiness for college, they aren't prepared to deal with the consequences.
    - If assessed in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, students will have a better chance of using the last two years of high school to focus on high-stakes testing and bringing themselves to a level where they are ready for college work. Guidance counselors and teachers will also be better in tune with the needs of individual students.
    - Local colleges would be able to work with school districts to help them provide additional academic support such as summer bridge programs

- There are also longer-term actions which we should take:
  - Develop SUNY system developmental math and writing classes
    - Currently, there is no transferability of remedial work successfully completed by students. Individual campuses have designed their own developmental programs and established their own student learning outcome expectations.
    - Courses that mimic the typical three-credit course structure that is composed of successive, full-semester segments can impede student movement into college courses. Students often need to develop very specific skills and are ill-served by courses that are designed for a broad range of student learning needs.
    - More efficient remedial efforts, including increased supplemental instruction, modular technology-enhanced instruction, and other fast-track intensive options would better serve students.
  - Develop more Associate of Occupational Sciences programs
    - Students transitioning from BOCES career and technical programs need pathways to careers requiring specialized training which entail little — if any — remediation. Programs appropriate from AOS degrees include Automotive Technology, Manufacturing Technical Systems, Culinary Services, Electrical Construction and Maintenances.
  - Part-Time Tuition Assistance Programs (TAP) for Associates Degree students
    - Low-income students in need of remediation have limited access to adequate financial aid for part-time studies.
    - They often take more courses than they are able to successfully complete in order to gain full-time status to receive adequate financial aid.
    - They also often fail courses that then need to be repeated, increasing the financial burden on themselves and the State and exhausting their financial aid eligibility.

The need for remediation is all too real, and it is critical to New York State that we work together to find solutions to this problem, as we educate New York's future workforce.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective with the Commission.