



February 10, 2022

New England Commission of Higher Education
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100
Burlington, MA 01803-4514

Dear Members of the New England Commission of Higher Education:

I write in support of the positive curriculum advances I have witnessed as we move toward our consolidation as the Connecticut State Community College. As a member of the Academic and Student Affairs Consolidation Committee, I worked on a committee to develop the Program Consolidation Guidelines for Discipline Work Groups to realize the Students First vision of “a single, academically integrated College [that] will provide a consistent, high quality higher education across Connecticut and enable students to take courses on different campuses without concerns about course transfer or conflicting program requirements.” I subsequently contributed to the alignment of the Humanities courses, and I led the alignment of the English courses as well as the English Studies A.A. degree. Currently, I co-lead work on revision of our delivery of developmental and gateway English.

In my discipline of English, consolidation was the impetus behind long overdue work in course alignment. Review of current syllabi made clear the impressive curriculum that had already been developed at individual colleges but also the discrepancies among commonly numbered courses at all twelve colleges, discrepancies that could impact student learning experiences as well as assessment of these courses. A rigorous dialogue among colleagues who participated in alignment work allowed us to develop meaningful and measurable course outcomes reflective of current scholarship in our field and best instructional practices. At the same time, we maintained instructional autonomy for the delivery of these courses. Collaborating with alignment managers, our work was sent out for feedback to all English faculty, and that feedback allowed for constructive changes to meet faculty concerns. As consolidation moves forward, with effective oversight of scheduling, student options for upper-level literature and creative writing courses will be greatly expanded. More importantly, course outcomes now emphasize the importance of diverse voices, and courses in the literature of traditionally underrepresented people will now be available to all students. I am confident the diverse curriculum in place will lead to further course development within the one college.

At a time when departments in the liberal arts are being downsized or eliminated, I am especially grateful that the value of such courses and programs is being recognized through this alignment work. Further, many of the faculty who collaborated on this work are excited by the possibility of expanded offerings on their campuses and are already discussing areas for growth in our discipline.



As an extension of this work, and as part of a separate initiative, I was invited to co-lead work in the redesign of our developmental curriculum with a focus on a corequisite model. Despite significant, positive changes made in our delivery of developmental education over the past ten years, our system wide KPIs indicate continued gaps in student success and completion of our gateway course, especially among minoritized groups. With the support of system leadership, we have been charged to design a success-focused and equity-minded curriculum that places all students in college-level English courses with corequisite support as needed. What is especially valuable about this work is that it is multi-dimensional in its planned implementation, with a vision including meaningful placement, comprehensive advising, and effective support services. Further, leadership has funded professional learning to prepare faculty as we transition to this new model. Although the work is in its initial stages of realization, based on the success experienced by other states that have implemented such a model, the work promises to meet its outcomes. Further, as someone who has taught our current Composition with corequisite support course for many years, and who has witnessed the success this model brings, I am eager to work on expanding it through this new initiative.

Both of these projects illustrate positive curricular changes that are being made to realize a one college structure focused on student needs and success. As a long-time faculty member, I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this work, shaping the English curriculum for the Connecticut State Community College.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James M. Gentile". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

James M. Gentile, Ph.D.
Professor of English
Manchester Community College