

Survey shows today's students less prepared

Faculty believes American education standards are lowering

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community here at Behrend.

Many high school seniors are graduating without having mastered the basic mathematical and English skills necessary for succeeding in college. Upon entering Behrend and completing Freshmen Testing, these students find themselves placed in the lowest level or "remedial" courses of English 004 (Basic Writing Skills) and Math 004 (Intermediate Algebra.)

Tina McCracken, professor of English, sees a definite problem of students lacking basic grammar skills. Most of these students schedule English 004, but often McCracken has students in her English 15 classes who hand in writing assignments with major grammatical errors far beyond an occasional misspelled word. Technically, these students should have mastered basic grammar in high school.

McCracken also feels that students lack critical research and writing skills as well. According to McCracken, an estimated 1/2 of the students she teaches lack research skills prior to taking her classes.

Mike Chiteman, Director of the Division of undergraduate Studies, has mixed views regarding the problem of undereducated students entering college. Chiteman says, "All students admitted to Penn State

Behrend's Baccalaureate Degree Program have a common high school background of courses." Chiteman feels that the problem lies in the fact that "some high schools have intense training in their programs and others do not." Thus, some entering college freshman fall below average in Freshmen Testing and end up in lower level courses tagged as "remedial."

Currently at Behrend, math 004 and English 004 do not count toward graduation because "they cover material not deemed to be of a college level," said Chiteman. However, Chiteman disagrees with this policy, and in the future, he would like to see PSU let these credits count towards graduation as elective courses.

Chiteman dislikes the tag name of "remedial" that is often used to describe these courses. In Chiteman's opinion, "Instructors at Behrend give background information that is beyond remedial and helps students become more successful on follow up courses." Chiteman also adds, "How can anyone not benefit from a review course?"

So is college remedial school revisited? Figures from the fall enrollment for 1990 show that seven sections of English 004 and three sections of Math 004 were offered for this semester. 143 students out 620 incoming

freshmen (23%) took English 004 and 103 students (17%) took Math 004. These figures show that the majority of incoming freshmen schedule average or above average courses in both English and Math.

However, McCracken says that she doesn't assume that her students already know the basics of grammar. Rather, she provides her classes with a quick review of grammar and organizational skills and then teaches the rest of her course in depth.

Whose fault is it that students are graduating from high school without having acquired basic English and math skills? Mike Chiteman hesitates to place the blame entirely on high school programs because often schools have small budgets and a shortage of qualified teachers and programs on hand.

Furthermore, Chiteman feels that the responsibility of education does not lie solely on the shoulders of one single institution.

According to Chiteman, "it is the students' responsibility to educate themselves," but he realizes that most students don't

view education this seriously in high school. Although Chiteman feels it is the responsibility of the educational system of a particular high school to educate its students, he feels parents are

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-Tina McCracken, Professor of English

also responsible and should take a more active part in motivating and educating their children. Chiteman mentions the important role that society plays in the education process as voters elect qualified representatives to the school board to implement

quality programs for the students in each district.

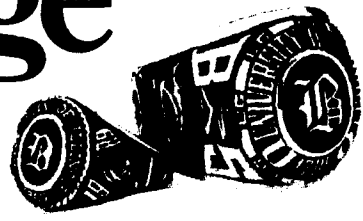
"If next year testing shows a need for more Math 004 or English 004 courses, it is our [the University's] responsibility to provide them," said Chiteman.

Perhaps another major part of the problem lies within the tracking system. McCracken points out that high schools place students into specific tracks or groups such as Basic, Academic, and Honors. Some tracks concentrate on grammar. Others focus on literature and research papers. McCracken proposes that high schools teach all elements in all tracks-general to advanced- to prepare students equally for the future.


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Chiteman cited that as Behrend grows, the enrollment standards are becoming tougher.

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