

An Interview with Brooke Dollens Terry: The Cost of Remedial Education

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An Interview with Brooke Dollens Terry: The Cost of Remedial Education

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Brooke Dollens Terry is an education policy analyst at the Texas Public Policy Foundation's Center for Education Policy. Before joining the Foundation, she worked at the Texas Workforce Commission in government relations and as a policy analyst for Commissioner Diane Rath. At the Workforce Commission, Brooke researched and analyzed child care, welfare, foster care, food stamps and a host of other workforce policy issues.

Prior to working in state government, Brooke worked in Washington D.C. for U.S. Senator Phil Gramm for two and a half years analyzing federal legislation and policy in the areas of banking, housing, education, welfare, judiciary and social issues. Upon Senator Gramm's retirement, Brooke worked for U.S. Senators John Cornyn and Richard Lugar as a legislative assistant. In Senator Lugar's office, she specialized in children nutrition issues.

During college, Brooke interned in U.S. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison's press office in Washington D.C., and in then-Governor George W. Bush's criminal justice division in Austin. Brooke graduated cum laude from Baylor University with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science. During her time at Baylor University, Brooke was actively involved with Baylor Ambassadors, student government, and Pi Beta Phi.

Brooke is a fifth generation Texan. She grew up in Houston and graduated from Cypress-Creek high school. Brooke and her husband Thomas reside in Austin and are members of Grace Covenant Church. In this interview, she responds to questions about the issue of remedial education for college students.

1) It seems that students who arrive at both two year, and four year institutions of higher learning are required or need to take developmental/remedial kinds of classes. What are the exact figures in your state, and what are the approximate figures nation-wide?

In Texas, 38 percent of students at public two-year colleges and 24 percent of students at public four-year colleges had to take remedial coursework during the fall of 2006. This equates to over 160,000 Texas students needing remedial courses. Nation-wide, the trend is similar with 42 percent of community college freshmen and 20 percent of freshmen at four-year institutions having to enroll in at least one remedial course.

2) Let's talk about specific areas. In which area do these students seem to need the most help- reading, math or writing?

In Texas, freshman need the most help with math. In 2003, roughly 47 percent of students needed help with math, 30% of students needed help with reading and 22 percent of students needed help with writing.

3) What are the "high costs" of remediation?

Remedial education is costly for students, for institutions of higher learning, for taxpayers, and for the economy.

It has a negative impact on students since the need for remedial coursework makes the attainment of a college degree less likely. It is costly to colleges and universities as they spend time and resources to re-teach basic skills before their students are ready for college-level work. It is expensive to taxpayers as they end up paying for the same material to be taught twice. Various studies estimate it cost the economy from \$3.7 billion to \$13 billion a year in lost wages, poor worker productivity, increased spending on social programs, and the direct cost to provide remediation.

4) Why do you think so many students need remediation in writing? Are English and History teachers neglected the art of the term paper? Or library research?

I think some teachers are so focused on teaching content that they forget to teach skills like writing or they think someone else will teach them writing skills. For example, a history teacher may not penalize students for spelling or grammatical errors in their papers because the history teacher believes they only teach history not

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Dr. Shaughnessy is currently Professor in Educational Studies and is a Consulting Editor for Gifted Education International and Educational Psychology Review. In addition, he writes for [www.EdNews.org](#) and the International Journal of Theory and Research in Education. He has taught students with mental retardation, learning disabilities and gifted. He is on the Governor's Traumatic Brain Injury Advisory Council and the Gifted Education Advisory Board in New Mexico. He is also a school psychologist and conducts in-services and workshops on various topics.

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writing. Yet, students need to realize that spelling and grammatical errors are unacceptable in the real world. I also find that students are not given many writing assignments in high school.

5) Okay, I confess. I had algebra, geometry and one semester of trigonometry. Yet, I still felt unprepared for college math. Do high schools need to emphasize more rigor, or more homework, or more assessment or what?

I think students need to have more rigor, more math skills, take more math courses and take math every year. It is not unusual in Texas for a student to take Algebra I in 8th grade, Geometry in 9th grade, Algebra II in 10th grade, Pre-Calculus in 11th grade and Calculus in 12th grade. In Texas, freshmen starting this year (2006-2007 school year) will have to take four years of math courses to graduate on the recommended or default graduation plan.

6) You have suggested that the Texas Education Agency ascertain which high schools send the most unprepared students to college and then they should publish the names of those high schools. Would this force teachers to teach more, or assign more difficult assignments?

I hope transparency of remediation data by high schools will cause those high schools to increase the rigor of their curriculum and really focus on teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic skills. I hope the goal of every high school is to prepare all students to be able to enter college or the workforce without the need for remediation.

7) What question have I neglected to ask?

I think teacher certification reform is important to decrease remediation rates. Reducing certification barriers for professionals with college degrees and work experience would allow these experts to enter the classroom and teach their expertise.

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