

# **An Exploration of Maine Community College's Admission Process**

*A Recommendation to Maine's Department of Education*

By

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### Abstract

It is no secret that the United States is falling way behind in world educational rankings. In 1995, the United States ranked 1st in the world for college graduates however, its ranking dramatically fell in 2005, earning 15th place (Woodruff, 2008). According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, most states earn a grade of C, D, or F when it comes to preparing college graduates for the workplace (2008). It is going to take a drastic overhaul of the United States educational system in order to reclaim its number one standing. However, one has to be cognizant of the diversity factor when comes to pre-requisites and other program admission requirements. We cannot continue admit prospective students into programs where the English language is critical to the success of the student and/or the safety of the public just to reach or exceed college admission department's financial goals. Not only will it be a disservice to the prospective student, but to the public as well.

## An Exploration of Maine Community College's Admission Process

### *A Recommendation to Maine's Department of Education*

There is no question that Maine's Community Colleges offer an affordable educational opportunity to both traditional and non-traditional adult learners. Nor can they be scrutinized for their open admissions policy. Where the problem begins is with what they omit in their general pre-requisites and pre-registered requirements for the medical assisting, coding, and nursing programs. It does not state anywhere in its literature or websites that fluent English skills are necessary (Central Maine Community College, 2009). It is not only detrimental to the student's progress, but a potential liability to the community at large. How can medical assistants, coders, or nurses work safely within the community transcribing medication orders or patient care instructions if they do not fluently speak or read English? This paper will offer recommendations to Maine's Department of Education regarding this highly sensitive, but very logical question.

As an Adjunct Medical Terminology Professor at Central Maine Community College, I can attest to the both the blessings and potential liabilities that a diverse student population brings forth. Maine has a huge Somali population, whom are full of ambition and pride. It seems to be a natural progression for them to seek out educational opportunities within the community college system, due to low costs and its open admission policy. However, I cannot express enough to the Department of Education, my concerns about the blatant disregard to acknowledge fluent English skills should be a requirement of the medical programs within the community college system.

As a professional board, MCCS (Maine Community College System) need to examine this area of concern. I first handedly have had Somali students who struggled to comprehend my lectures due to the complexities of medical terminology. Again, they were not alone, some American students too, presented with difficulties, but one can imagine how exemplified the challenges become if one does not initially understand basic English directions. I too, have openly caught several Somali students cheating on nightly quizzes/exams as a result of not being able to master spelling or understanding test questions. When approached independently they said "I did not know that was

wrong.” My concerns were expressed to the Department Chair as well as the Academic Dean and were told that I would have to proceed with caution due to the sensitivity of the issue and to make a onetime allowance. One can imagine my surprise, deepened concern, and frustration. I also did not see any improvement in grades, spelling, or comprehension at the end of the term. However, most of my Somali students passed with a C or C- average which entitled them to progress to the next course.

I too, have completed a Medical Assisting program and have worked as one in the healthcare industry. I can attest to the life or death liability a misspelled medication or nursing order can lead to without intention. According to Datarayusa.com, medical errors of all kinds claim as many as 98,000 American lives each year and are the eighth leading cause of death in the United States. Imagine how those statistics will increase if we do not make English fluency a requirement for all medical assistant, coding, nursing majors. There is limited research in regards to medical errors as a result of limited English skills of the nursing staff because this is a new issue. We are a national “melting pot” of blended cultures and races. The previous statistics reports more on the non-speaking patient and lack of medical and pharmaceutical interpreters, but if we continue to graduate medical assisting, coding, and/or nursing students who have limited English skills they will either end up underemployed or worse potentially causing the death of an innocent person; all for the sake of admission statistics, goals, and funding.

The M CCS has the responsibility to their students, shareholders, professors, and public to ensure safety and limit liability. According to Central Maine Community College, they do test individuals in the areas of reading, writing, and math, but the results do not lead to required ESL pre-requisites, rather the student is “encouraged” to take the offered ESL class in conjunction with their core classes (Central Maine et al., 2009). It should be mandatory to test English comprehension and writing, then based on results the prospective student should be required to successfully complete a series of ESL core class, and conclude with another test to determine if progress has been reached. If the student still falls short M CCS should request further ESL classes or merely suggest another major that would not require such aptitude in English skills. This would not be a huge increase in costs for the college or students, but could limit the M CCS from future liability claims and law suits.

#### Conclusion

The State of Maine, like most of America, is falling way short when it comes to adult education. It is mainly due to stale teaching ideologies/curriculums and the pursuit of profits over quality education. One thing is certain, Maine demographics are becoming increasingly diverse and rather than addressing obvious hazards due to

the “sensitivity” of the issue, MCCS continue to disenfranchise its foreign students by granting diplomas that are in a sense worthless due to limited English skills. So I ask the question again Maine Department of Education, “*how can medical assistants, coders, or nurses work safely within the community transcribing medication orders or patient care instructions if they do not fluently speak or read English?*” It does not and should not be about diploma milling; rather it should be about positively investing in Maine’s changing adult learning demographic!

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