

Maura Smyth, humanities professor at MassArt
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Board of Higher Education

Thank you to Chair Gabrieli, Commissioner Ortega, and to all of the members of the Board of Higher Ed. I want to extend a warm welcome to you as you visit our beloved campus.

My name is Maura Smyth, and I am a professor of Humanities at MassArt. Like my colleagues, I want to speak about the 90-credit bachelor's degree. As you consider specific pilot programs in the coming months, I urge you to slow things down and reconsider its impact.

When I hear about this 90-credit "bachelors", I hear how – finally! – it's a way to fix the costs of higher ed. Students will finish in three years, thus saving a quarter of the cost of college! They'll get the same education, just more efficiently! They'll get to the workforce faster, where they can make money sooner!

Will companies, though, accept a truncated degree, especially as they are clamoring for graduates to have *better* problem-solving skills, *more inspired* creativity, *deeper and broader* abilities to communicate and work in groups? No one knows, making the initial graduates subjects of an experiment with dubious odds.

Will the graduates of a watered-down bachelors enter the workforce with as many connections, make as much of a starting salary, or be as generally successful as someone who went to an established, robust bachelor's with a solid foundation in the liberal arts? No one knows, although it strains credulity to imagine how they could.

Will professors be able to fit all of the skills and insights and learning of a 4-year program into 90 credits? As one of the professors who might be tasked with the burden of cramming even more into less time – and to be honest, as a thinking human being – I have grave doubts.

The only thing that IS certain is that the last solution to the soaring costs of higher ed we should be considering is one that hurts our students.

We should actually fund public higher education at rates that show that we value it, instead of the accelerating disinvestment of the last several decades. We should cut back on administrative bloat, which as we all know, has skyrocketed during that same time.

Our students, our children, the next and future generations, not only deserve it; they need it.

Our students are inheriting this beautiful and broken world from us. They are relying on us to do our best by them, do right by them, so that they can handle this impossible burden. They need us to pass on the learning and knowledge and maybe even wisdom to help them fix what's so broken, to imagine a better world. They require us to help them learn how to contextualize the problems they will face, negotiate tricky social and geopolitical situations, create new structures of community and wellbeing, and contribute to the public good in ways that eclipse what we have been able to do.

So. We can maintain the status quo of bloated administrations in woefully underfunded public higher ed and offer our students a diluted, diminished 90-credit bachelor's degree that leaves them ill-equipped for the future.

Or we can fix what is actually causing the exorbitant cost of public higher ed. To do that, we must double down on providing our students with a robust, multifaceted 120-credit bachelor's that will allow them to meet the future with an abundance of imagination, skills, and knowledge to make it better.