

One of my responsibilities is to grant MATC credits to students transferring courses in from other colleges. In an ideal situation, any student wants us to accept as many credits as possible from their previous institution so that they don't have to spend the time and money taking a class or classes they might already have taken. In my 12 years at MATC, I have reviewed thousands of transcripts, including many that have come from for-profit institutions.

I first became aware of these institutions when I would try to find information about a particular course so that I could determine its transferability. I am an accomplished surfer of college websites and generally know how to channel right in to catalogs and course descriptions. However, many of the for-profit college websites – particularly those that weren't accredited – would not have an online catalog. If I was lucky, and after some hunting, I might find a program page that listed the names of courses that were needed to become a nurse, for example, but where were the descriptions of these courses? Why was there no mention of a lab in an anatomy and physiology, microbiology, or chemistry course? Can you imagine taking one of these courses without a lab? And how is it that the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at one institution mainly just lists several business-oriented variations of a Communications degree? That isn't what Liberal Arts is all about. I know that because a Liberal Arts education is my business. But many students have no idea what they are being sold by these institutions. They focus on careers and sell the dream, but not the details. Those details are hurting students when they try to transfer their credits to accredited colleges, such as MATC.

I have had many occasions where I had to tell a student that their credits wouldn't transfer because the institution they attended wasn't regionally accredited. Or they took a course that was called anatomy and physiology but was really geared for a medical office assistant program and not for someone planning to become a nurse. I look at student transcripts and see courses that are geared toward a career but don't meet General Education requirements. As an administrator of Natural Science, I have to question the quality of science classes – particularly when so many of the for-profit institutions focus on careers in the Health fields, especially nursing. It is easy to start offering classes in a strip mall or online. It is another thing entirely to be able to set up labs to offer a quality science curriculum. As a parent of two college students who watches every penny that is spent on their education to make sure they are getting a quality education in an affordable way, it is hard to look at the transcripts of the students who went to some of the for-profit schools and see that they just spent two years of their lives and thousands of dollars on courses that were essentially meaningless from a transfer standpoint. And then they come to MATC or another college and have to start over again. More time and more money. I can't imagine how they feel. Yes, I can imagine because I see the disbelief, frustration and sometimes anger in their faces – or hear it in their voices on the phone – when I tell them that they have to retake a class they thought they had taken before. I receive e-mails asking me to make an exception because they have to graduate soon so they can get a job. I can't make those exceptions when the content of the courses they have taken just doesn't measure up.

For these reasons and others, I encourage you to approve the proposed ordinance regarding city financial assistance of for-profit institutions of higher education.