

U.S. Rep. Grothman: Seeks to strengthen accountability in higher education

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(Washington, D.C.) – This week, at a House Education and Labor Committee hearing, Congressman Glenn Grothman (R-Glenbeulah) questioned witnesses on accreditation practices for high school teachers that teach dual enrollment courses, in an effort to keep Wisconsin's dual enrollment programs strong and lower the cost of college for Wisconsinites. His assertion, corroborated by Ms. Barbara Brittingham, is that too much emphasis is being placed on finding teachers with master's degrees, while other highly capable individuals sit on the sidelines.

Witnesses included:

- Professor Nicholas Hillman, Ph.D.
- o Associate Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison
 - Ms. Melissa Emrey-Arras
- o Director, Education, Workforce and Income Security issues at the U.S. Government Accountability Office
 - Mr. Noe Ortega
- o Deputy Secretary for the Office of Postsecondary and Higher Education at the PA Department of Education

- Ms. Barbara E. Brittingham, Ph.D.
 - o President of the New England Commission of Higher Education

Excerpts of Grothman's questioning

Congressman Grothman: "Dr. Brittingham, as you know, dual enrollment is becoming a bigger and bigger thing in Wisconsin and nationwide, and one of the problems we have over time is credentialism for people that are teaching students, correct? Are you aware of that problem?"

Dr. Barbara E. Brittingham: *"That is something that we look at, that's right."*

Grothman: "Right, and dual enrollment is a tremendous thing. It allows people to get through college quicker. Kids who participate in dual enrollment classes have a tendency to do better. But, there is a concern among both high schools and colleges affiliated with them as you put more and more credentialism on some of these teachers, you're going to have a hard time finding the teachers to teach these classes. I wondered if you could comment on that or if there is anything you think we can do about this? In my opinion, sometimes credentialism is meaningless. It is a shame if people are dissuaded or find it impossible to participate in these dual enrollment classes because credentialism might not show that a teacher is better. Do you have any comments on that or is there anything to do about it?"

Brittingham: *"I'm not sure what the long term solution is, it's something that our commission looks at. I think there are variations in dual enrollment and I think one of the things that is greatly needed is some kind of empirical study that follows up on these students. We have sporadic studies but we really do not have a lot of information about where the students go, how many of the credits transfer, and can the dual enrollment be validated by the student's success in subsequent courses. So I think there is much more to do. That said, I think that students do benefit from having well qualified teachers and faculty members and I think distance education offers us an opportunity to make sure that anybody who is teaching a college level class is prepared to do that."*

Grothman: "Would you agree that sometimes a master's degree does not make you a better teacher?"

Brittingham: *"Yes alas, I would agree with that."*

Grothman: “So do you think there is some way we can find alternative means of accreditation to make sure these kids are able to get into dual enrollment classes?”

Brittingham: *“I think distance education offers us some great opportunities both for students in high schools to take courses offered through distance education by the colleges in their community and have teachers in their high schools work alongside them perhaps. It’s a problem.”*

Grothman: “Do you think it can be solved to a certain extent by finding alternative credentialism for some of these teachers?”

Brittingham: *“I am not sure what you mean by alternative credentials?”*

Grothman: “Alternative accreditation. If you could find a teacher being accredited maybe right now we are requiring a masters, but finding some other way of saying this is a good teacher even though they don’t have a master’s degree?”

Brittingham: *“There may be. I’m not aware of anybody doing that right now.”*

GG: “Do you think it would be a good thing to look into?”

Brittingham: *“Sure.”*

[Click here](#) to view Grothman’s remarks.

Additional Information

Dual enrollment programs are innovative education models that drive student participation in post-secondary education and lower the overall cost of college. Some dual enrollment programs even allow students to earn an associate’s degree at the same time that they graduate high school. Higher education institutions with dual enrollment programs work closely with high school teachers to ensure that students receive the same rigor and quality that they would on-campus.

Unfortunately, a 2015 guideline by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), could potentially harm the number of dual enrollment programs in Wisconsin, as a large portion of Wisconsin’s high school dual enrollment teachers do not meet the new requirements. The HLC guideline requires high school teachers that teach dual enrollment courses to have (a) a Master’s degree in the subject area they are teaching or (b) a Master’s degree in another discipline, with 18 Master’s-level credit

hours in the subject area that they are teaching.