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SUN EDITORIAL:

A worthy initiative

UNLV's Smatresk offers proposal to explore reasons behind the need for remedial education

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College-bound students who graduate from high school in this state should have sufficient English and math skills to succeed at the university level from Day One.

The reality, as reported Sunday by Emily Richmond in the Las Vegas Sun, is quite different. A startling percentage of those graduates — more than one-third — required remedial classes in English and math after enrolling last year in the state's colleges and universities.

That is why we support a proposed initiative by UNLV President Neal Smatresk to find out why so many freshmen are entering the university ill-prepared for the course work that awaits them. Because the Clark County School District produces 80 percent of UNLV's undergraduate students, we also find it reassuring that district Superintendent Walt Rulfes supports the initiative.

Exploring the reasons why so many high school graduates require remedial courses is long overdue. This is no simple task because there are so many issues at stake, including curriculum, testing, parental involvement, teacher experience, class sizes and classroom resources.

Smatresk was right when he told the Sun: "If we come up with the right prescription to fill those critical skills gaps, then I think we can give our students an edge."

To accomplish that goal, he proposed that undergraduate students pay a \$1-per-credit-hour surcharge, which would raise \$500,000 a year for student academic assessments and tutoring as well as for remedial classes.

It is imperative, though, that students have proper English and math tools before they are handed their high school diplomas. That way, UNLV and Nevada's other institutions of higher education can focus on the advanced course work that will help develop the state's future leaders.

Reducing and eventually eliminating remedial education at the collegiate level is a winning proposition for everyone involved. Smatresk, who plans to seek Board of Regents approval of his plan in December, deserves its full support.