

- SUBJECT:** Formula funding flexibility for doctoral students taking over 99 hours
- COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 9 ayes — Rangel, Cuellar, F. Brown, Farabee, Goolsby, J. Jones, Morrison, E. Reyna, Wohlgemuth
- 0 nays
- WITNESSES:** For — Audrey Colombe, Texas State Employees Union; Deborah Cook, Doctoral Students Association at Texas A&M University Commerce; Denise Gobert, Texas Graduate Students
- Against — None
- On — Ronald G. Douglas, Texas A&M University; Terri Flack, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board; Anneliese Reinemeyer, Texas A&M University Graduate Student Council
- BACKGROUND:** The 75th Legislature capped formula funding for resident doctoral students paying in-state tuition at 99 semester credit hours. To make up the formula funding revenue loss, institutions of higher education may charge up to the non-resident tuition rate for doctoral students.
- The law allows the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to approve formula funding for resident doctoral students taking between 99 and 130 hours at the in-state tuition rate for three reasons: if needed for the particular doctoral program to remain competitive nationally, if the student's work would benefit medicine or science, or for other compelling academic reasons.
- DIGEST:** CSHB 1882 would allow the coordinating board to establish guidelines providing other reasonable exceptions to allow doctoral students to take up to 130 semester credit hours while paying in-state tuition.
- The coordinating board would approve formula funding for all doctoral students enrolled in a doctoral program that is substantially similar to a doctoral program:
- ! that is offered at a medical or dental unit;

- ! that commonly requires more than 100 semester credit hours; and
- ! that is funded in a way not directly dependent on the tuition rate charged other Texas residents.

The bill would require each institution to notify in writing each entering doctoral student about the credit-hour tuition limits.

CSHB 1882 would instruct the Legislature not to count non-resident doctoral tuition charged to Texas students taking more courses than the 99-hour cap when calculating local funds available to higher education institutions.

The bill would apply to formula funding after September 1, 1999, and would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 1882 would give the coordinating board more flexibility in creating reasonable, academically-based exceptions to the 99-hour cap for paying in-state tuition. It would allow doctoral students in programs legitimately requiring 100 or more semester credit hours to complete their programs without being punished with higher tuition charges.

The “slacker” law originally was designed to encourage students to make progress toward completing degrees, rather than lingering for years in college. However, in the cases that this bill would affect, the law financially penalizes hard-working students who have legitimate reasons to take a higher number of credit hours. The coordinating board recently has established many of the rules authorized in this bill. CSHB 1882 expressly would support the coordinating board’s ability to fine tune this policy. The bill also would require that students be fully informed of the semester credit hour regulations affecting them.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

CSHB 1882 should go further. It should include a provision to exempt doctoral students who began their programs before the 99-hour law was enacted. SB 345 by Bivins, signed by the governor earlier this session, cleaned up the undergraduate 170 semester-credit-hour law, and included an exemption for students enrolled prior to the fall semester 1999. A similar provision for doctoral students would allow students to complete degrees under the same rules that applied when they entered their programs.

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NOTES: The committee substitute added the provision directing the Legislature to base funding calculations not including extra tuition charged for students above the 99-hour cap and required written notification to students of the 99-hour rule.