

- SUBJECT:** Transferring credits to general academic institutions
- COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 7 ayes — Branch, Patrick, Clardy, Darby, Howard, Murphy, Raney
0 nays
2 absent — Alonzo, Martinez
- WITNESSES:** For — Mark Milliron, Western Governors University - Texas;
(*Registered, but did not testify:* Rey Garcia, Texas Association of Community Colleges; Leslie Helmcamp, Center for Public Policy Priorities; Thomas Lindsay, Texas Public Policy Foundation; Nelson Salinas, Texas Association of Business; Justin Yancy, Texas Business Leadership Council)

Against — None

On — John Fitzpatrick, Educate Texas; Richard Rhodes, Austin Community College; Gretchen Schmidt, Jobs for the Future; (*Registered, but did not testify:* David Gardner and Macgregor Stephenson, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board)
- DIGEST:** CSHB 30 would make several changes to the Education Code that would affect the transferability of credits from public junior colleges, public state colleges, and public technical institutes to the state’s general academic teaching institutions.
- Articulation agreements.** CSHB 30 would require the state’s general academic teaching institutions to establish articulation agreements for at least five degree plans with each public junior college from which the general academic teaching institution has received an average of at least 5 percent of the institution’s transfer students in the three preceding years. A degree plans that was the subject of an agreement would be one for which credit is frequently transferred to the institution from the junior colleges.
- The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board would adopt rules to administer these agreements.

Publication of requirements. The bill also would require institutions to publish online a detailed description of learning objectives, content, and prior knowledge requirements for at least 12 courses offered by the institution for which credit is frequently transferred to the institution from lower-division institutions of higher education.

Semester credit hours required for an associate's degree. An institution of higher education would not be allowed to require a student to complete more than the minimum number of credit hours required for the degree by the institution's accrediting agency. Exceptions would be made for additional credits required for academic accreditation or professional licensure. The coordinating board would adopt appropriate rules and could review degree plans to ensure compliance.

Data on course offerings. CSHB 30 would require institutions to specifically identify any course included in the common course numbering system that had been added to or removed from their lists of course offerings for the current academic year. The coordinating board would distribute information on these changes as necessary.

When institutions compile and publish course offerings they would be required to certify that they did not prohibit the acceptance of transfer credits based solely on the accreditation of the sending institution, nor could they include language in any publication that such a prohibition exists.

Transfer of common course number credits. Institutions would be required to grant a transferring student credit for each course they attempted to transfer that served as an equivalent course under the common course numbering system at the institution from which the student transferred.

Common-core courses advisory board. The coordinating board, with the assistance of the common-core advisory board, would develop a course-specific core curriculum for each broad academic discipline within the general core curriculum and would identify those degree programs to which the course specific core curriculum would be fully transferrable between institutions of higher education.

The coordinating board would be allowed to appoint administrators of

institutions of higher education to the board.

Effective dates. Institutions would be required to publish online information about articulation agreements no later than May 31, 2015. Changes made to comprehensive course lists by the bill would take effect for the 2014-15 academic year. The coordinating board would implement the common core curricula requirements of the bill no later than May 31, 2015. Changes to the common course numbering system, as required by the bill, would take place and apply by the beginning of the fall 2013 semester.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2013.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 30 would help students transfer more of their credits from community colleges to four-year colleges and universities. Studies show that such students lose as much as 1.3 years of school work to credits that do not end up transferring. The United States loses billions of dollars to inefficient credit transfer systems. The students who suffer the most from this system are the poorest, who cannot afford to lose money on credits that do not transfer.

Too often students are confused by about what course are required or accepted for the degree program they intend to transfer into. As a result, the student ends up taking and paying for more semester credit hours than are necessary or not completing a degree at all.

CSHB 30 would help to address these problems by improving transfer pathways and shortening the time to a degree.

The bill would require universities to publish detailed information on learning objectives and requirements for at least 12 courses for which credit is most frequently transferred. Universities also would be required to establish agreements on course transfers with their feeder community colleges.

The bill would prevent universities from requiring more than the minimum number of course credits for a degree, with exceptions for those required for professional licensing or accreditation.

It also would improve the transparency of the common course numbering system, which provides a shared, uniform, set of course designations that better allow students and advisors to determine course equivalency. The bill would require that the common course system be kept up to date. CSHB 30 also would ensure that a transferring student would receive credit from a receiving institution for each course that the student successfully completed that serves as an equivalent course under the common course numbering system.

Finally, the bill would require the coordinating board and institutions of higher education to develop a course-specific core curriculum for each broad academic discipline and to identify those degree programs to which the course specific core curriculum was transferable.

The bill would not endanger an institution's academic independence or accreditation because the institutions still would have the directive to negotiate articulation agreements and lay out the requirements of their most commonly transferred courses. CSHB 30 would not tell institutions what course credits to accept; rather, the bill would direct them to tell others what they will accept. This would improve transparency and facilitate successful course transfer.

Any additional reporting costs resulting from the bill would be offset by the efficiency and transparency gains it would facilitate.

It would be appropriate to appoint university administrators to the common core advisory committee because they are better able to represent the interests of their entire institution. They should have a say on the committee. Further, the bill would not change the requirement that faculty form a majority of the committee members.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

CSHB 30 could undermine the local control that general academic teaching institutions have traditionally had to determine which courses, and what course outcomes, would be appropriate for transfer into their degree programs. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the accrediting agency for Texas' major colleges and universities, requires institutions of higher education to have this discretion. The standard for transfer credits is that a school should only accept those courses for a degree program that it would have taught itself and that had the same course outcomes. CSHB 30 would undermine this discretion by encouraging institutions to accept courses they might not have otherwise.

While it is true that many credits from community colleges do not end up transferring to the state's general academic teaching institutions, that is usually because many of those credits are of a vocational nature. Those courses taught application and practice, not theory, which is the hallmark of higher education.

The streamlining of the transfer of course credits, beyond reducing agency autonomy, would reduce the innovation and competition that comes with letting institutions of higher education choose set their own standards.

The bill would increase the reporting requirements of institutions of higher education. They already suffer from the massive administrative reporting burdens laid upon them by their accrediting agencies, the coordinating board, the Legislature, and others. Adding additional reporting requirements would divert resources from the core missions of teaching and research.

Adding college and university administrators to the common-core advisory committee would mean fewer spots for faculty, who ultimately know the most about teaching, learning, and the content required to ensure that students meet learning expectations. The decisions on common-core should belong to them. The bill would open the door to others to what had appropriately been a faculty advisory committee.